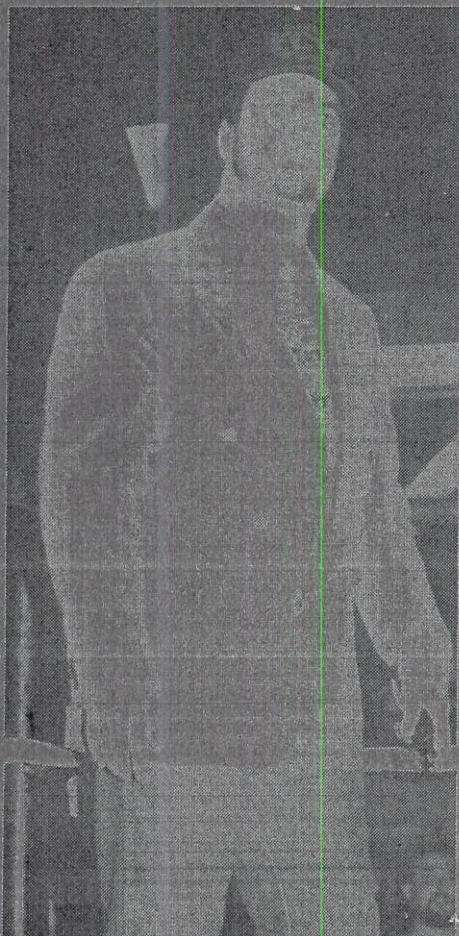


PRO WRESTLING 1995



**PAUL HEYMAN: BOOKER OF THE YEAR,
ECW PROMOTION OF THE YEAR**



**SHAWN MICHAELS: MVP, BEST BABYFACE,
BEST FEUD, BEST WORKRATE, FAVORITE**

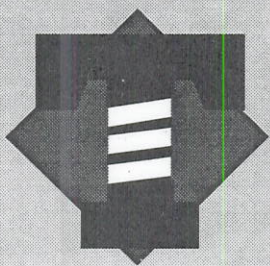


**CACTUS JACK: BRAWLER OF THE YEAR,
BEST ON INTERVIEWS**

PRO WRESTLING TORCH 1995 YEARBOOK

EDITOR/PUBLISHER: WADE D. KELLER

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PRO WRESTLING 1995

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1995 Pro Wrestling Torch
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Welcome to the eighth annual *Pro Wrestling Torch Yearbook*—titled "Pro Wrestling 1995." This year's book carries on the tradition of the last several years, keeping the same format while improving upon the content. The formula for this annual yearbook covers in-depth many aspects of the U.S. and Japanese wrestling scenes in 1995.

The yearbook begins with the fifth annual "Top 50 Stories of the Year." The introduction of that feature is a report card of sorts grading how well several key players dealt with the challenges they faced in 1995. The next ten pages are dedicated to an in-depth analysis of the top ten stories of 1995 and how those stories affected the first couple of months of 1996. A listing of stories 11-50 are accompanied by brief comments on each of those stories.

The "Torch Year-End Awards" come next, including expanded reader comments in a couple of the primary categories and an expanded listing of the secondary award categories. In past years, only the top three finishers in each category were listed. This year, either the top five or top ten finishers in the categories are listed (whether it is five or ten depends on how spread out the voting was in each respective category). This year, also included are my picks and the picks of the *Torch* columnists for not just the primary categories, but also the secondary categories.

"Wrestling's Most Influential List" rates the 15 most influential people in the industry with analysis on each finisher. Also included is a history of past lists and comments on why past finishers didn't make the list this year. Added to this year's "Torch WorldWide Top 100 Ratings" is analysis on why the top 10 finishers placed where they did on the list by looking at their in-ring achievements in 1995.

Bruce Mitchell and Chris Zavisa have their usual place in the yearbook with their excellent annual features. Mitchell captures important, ironic, and some not-so-important moments of 1995 in a way no other feature and no other writer could. Zavisa's "Japan Wrestling Encyclopedia" ranks the top promotions in Japan and analyzes the changes of each promotion throughout the year. Whether you are a novice or expert when it comes to the Japan wrestling scene, Zavisa's feature covers all bases clearly and with insight.

This year's "Torch Talk Special" follows in the tradition of Terry Funk, Ted DiBiase, and Konnan from the most recent yearbooks. This year it is Steve Austin who walks step-by-step through his career providing a first-hand perspective and honest opinions regarding the various stages he has gone through in his career. Those stages include being a fan, training to be a wrestler, looking for work, then looking for work that pays enough to cover food and rent, dealing with office politics, trying to improve in the ring and behind the mic, dealing with injuries, dealing with career transitions, and contemplating career goals over the long term. Very special thanks goes out to Steve Austin for his willingness to open up his career and his life for the readers of this publication.

The final section of the yearbook is the "Pro Wrestling Torch 1995 Appendix" featuring results and key statistics on all major U.S. pay-per-view events in 1995, a list of title changes, a list of rosters and real names of wrestlers, an all-new feature listing relatives in wrestling, a listing of past secondary award winners, and an expanded glossary of over 150 wrestling terms and definitions.

As interesting a year as 1995 was to cover each week in the pages of *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly*, 1996 is shaping up to be even more interesting. In the first two months of 1996 Vince McMahon has gone on the offensive against WCW on the air and behind the scenes, WCW has aggressively gone after several top WWF names, meanwhile house show business, TV ratings, and pay-per-view buyrates have increased to stop if not reverse the downward trend that at the end of 1995 appeared to be crippling the industry, plus the Ultimate Fights continue to be a fascinating success story for what are in essence the first non-worked pro wrestling matches since early this century.

We will be back in one year with another 70-plus page perspective on how 1996 turns out. And in the mean time, we will chronicle the industry every week in the *Torch* newsletter. Special thanks to everyone who helped make 1995 another year of unprecedented growth for *Pro Wrestling Torch* and to those who contributed to the content of this yearbook, especially the record number of readers who took the time and energy to send in their year-end awards ballots. Although the latest *Torch* writer, John Williams, does not appear with a byline in this yearbook, special thanks to him for his valuable insight regarding several features in the yearbook, including the "Top Ten Stories of 1995" and the "Top 100 Ratings." Special thanks also to our printers who do such an excellent job not just with this yearbook, but coming through on time every week with a high-quality job on the newsletter.

I say this every year—and I mean it. Putting this yearbook together is a daunting task that takes me literally hundreds of hours to research, type, layout, and proofread. Part of what makes my work and the hard work of all of the contributors worthwhile (and helps us get better each year) is your honest feedback in the weeks that follow. Thanks for making 1995 another great year to produce the *Torch*.

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PRO WRESTLING TORCH HOTLINE

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THE TOP

50

Nineteen-ninety-five was a year of tests. Some passed, some failed, some had the cards stacked against them, others goofed off despite A-grade potential. Now, they're report card...

The Monday Night Wars tested the ability of WCW to compete on the same level as the WWF. In past years, even with the power of TBS behind them, WCW management were unable to build enough momentum to challenge the WWF. In 1995, Eric Bischoff and Hulk Hogan felt WCW was at a point where challenging the WWF head-on was the next logical step. They certainly passed the test and actually won the battle of the first four months. Not only were they surprisingly close to Raw in the ratings, but they put the WWF on the defensive. Plus, from a production value standpoint they came through beyond anyone's expectations shooting ahead of the WWF with the look of Nitro's set, entry way, intro graphics, and use of music. The WWF still had superior post-production techniques, but WCW gets a good grade overall, with the weakness being booking. Given the pressure to provide main events every week, clean finishes went out the window. Politically, run-ins were the only way to avoid being distracted by having to constantly soothe fragile egos. Meanwhile, the WWF didn't skip a beat. It improved the content of Raw and edged the steaming newcomer in the ratings. The Monday Night Wars were the talk of the wrestling industry on several levels, from fans to wrestlers to promoters to executives. That was the number one story of 1995. The biggest negative of the war was the initial drop in pay-per-view buyrates. WCW's grade: B. WWF's grade: B.

The number two story had more immediate real-life impact on the profitability of both major promotions. Early in the year, first the WWF and then WCW expanded their pay-per-view schedule to where they were running monthly pay events. The test was whether the marketplace could support that schedule. The dropping buyrates suggest the saturation point was met. The concept and execution of monthly events earns a D+.

The WWF chose Diesel over Razor Ramon, Undertaker, Bret Hart, and

everyone else to be their franchise player in 1995. While Diesel gets a C- for his role as champion, the WWF gets an F for its push of him. Talk about stacking the deck against someone, the WWF did just that.

Hulk Hogan meanwhile was WCW's easy choice to be their top man. Hogan had an adequate year at best. His in-ring performances had never been worse, his interviews and ring persona were erratic and shallow, and the TV ratings and buyrates he drew were better than most others would have done, but for him they were a disappointment. For 1995, he gets a C.

Wrestlemania XI didn't do well on its test. The WWF seemed to do enough right that a good buyrate was a reasonable expectation. But a weak line-up for a card of such magnitude, the poor promoting of Diesel as champion, and the overestimation of Lawrence Taylor's popularity earned Wrestlemania a D-.

UFC strengthened its young foundation during 1995 with four strong buyrates, doing a good job defending their product against the media, and set the stage for a strong 1996, therefore they earn a solid A.

Pat Patterson's retirement opened up room for others to gain power in the WWF. With Bill Watts, The Clique, and others vying for power, Vince McMahon's control of the WWF was tested. McMahon's grade for handling Patterson's departure: C.

ECW's influence worldwide was amazing considering its revenues. ECW earns an A for its product, but a D+ for marketing it. They should have progressed further in 1995. Maybe they'll catch up in '96.

SMW went out of business in 1995, which means they get an F for failure. That said, promoter Jim Cornette gets an A for effort but a D for the ways in which at times he directed that effort.

WCW was aggressive in adding new talent throughout the year, and gets an A for the talent they hired. But they score a C- for failing to capitalize on the talent once they were hired.

As 1996 begins rolling along, there are already indications of who learned lessons from 1995 and who slept through their classes.

Stories of 1995

WCW senior vice president Eric Bischoff knew he was taking a chance. It's one thing to talk big and claim to friends, employees, colleagues, and reporters that you have the dominant product. It's especially brave when most people at the time thought the competition's showcase program on Monday nights was as good as a wrestling show could get. Most thought Bischoff was going to get his brash words thrown back in his face. In fact, a headline for a July 31 editorial in *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly* read: "WCW shows they are unprepared to go head to head with the WWF and they don't realize it."

Kevin Sullivan on spin-patrol told reporters after the Sept. 4 debut of WCW Monday Nitro that wrestling viewers don't know where TNT is on their cable systems because they were used to watching WCW on TBS. Because of that he estimated it would take at least 8 or 9 months for WCW's new program to compete.

The real test came the next Monday. The WWF didn't sit back and confidently watch Nitro burn against a perennial top rated wrestling program. Instead, they featured Razor Ramon defending the IC Title against British Bulldog and Shawn Michaels in his first nationally televised match against Sid since they broke up months earlier. WCW meanwhile held back nothing as they featured Hulk Hogan against Lex Luger, Randy Savage against Scott Norton, and the debut of Sabu.

PRO WRESTLING TORCH

Luger vs. Hogan
narrowly beats Ramon
vs. Bulldog and Sid vs.
Michaels in ratings

[illegible]

It took Nitro all of two or three weeks of hype to then go head-to-head and beat Raw. Critics of WCW said they were giving too much away for free, but the WWF in response aired matches of nearly equal name-value caliber.

Vince McMahon was openly upset. He said on talk shows that Nitro could have been scheduled on any night of the week or during any timeslot. "I question the motives of those at WCW who made this decision," McMahon said on NewSport. "It's obvious that those at WCW are attempting to hurt the WWF and its fans. They are not content on attempting to help themselves, but rather hurt a competitor. A very poor marketing philosophy, in my view."

It didn't matter to WCW that by going up against Raw they would have to share Raw's audience rather than have all wrestling viewers to themselves. Bischoff, never being one for ambiguity or subtlety, wanted to see the results of WCW locking horns with the WWF.

Before the year was over, Raw held a slight edge in the battle. Raw's average was 2.433 while Nitro's average was 2.386. Nitro's neck and neck position is more impressive considering that on the West Coast, Nitro aired at 6 p.m. whereas Raw was staggered to a prime time slot in every time zone. Nitro also pulled in strong ratings for its replay three hours later averaging around a 1.0 rating. Combining both airings of Nitro, it was by a wide margin the most watched program every Monday night.

The ratings were the concrete results of what quickly became a bitter rivalry over the airwaves. While the WWF remained quiet until the beginning of the following year (with the biting Billionaire Ted skits), WCW attacked the WWF relentlessly every week. On the Sept. 11 Nitro, the first night Raw aired against Nitro, Bischoff read the results of Monday Night Raw matches on the air, boasting that the WWF's show is pre-taped and theirs is live. That ruffled a lot of feathers in the industry as not only did Bischoff mention the WWF, but he gave away pre-taped results, considered taboo.

Bischoff talked on the air about Luger jumping to WCW: "Only nine days ago he was wrestling for the WWF. He decided he didn't want to play with kids anymore, so he decided to come to where the big boys play." He said the WWF's champion barely made it past mid-card status in WCW. He said Shawn Michaels's superkick wouldn't earn him a green belt.

If wrestling fans had been sleep walking through their wrestling viewing, the war woke them up and raised their antennas. Every week WCW produced pay-per-view main event caliber matches live. Raw didn't change all that much as it was taped four shows at a time at monthly TV tapings. The only difference was there were fewer squash matches which might encourage channel flipping.

By the end of the year, the Monday Night Wars had led to much larger overall viewership on Monday nights, but that increased audience was not translating into increased buyrates or house show attendance. In the first two months of 1996, not only did ratings rise for both groups, but so did buyrates and attendance.

BUYRATES CRASH ALL YEAR

Expanded schedule, focus on ratings hurts revenues

The Monday Night Wars made headlines for the final four months of the year, but its biggest influence may have been on the buyrates. Both WCW and the WWF saw buyrates declining all year. When the Monday Night Wars began in September, buyrates shot down at a faster rate.

For their five pay-per-views prior to Nitro, WCW averaged a 0.81 buyrate and grosses of \$2,080,000. After the introduction of Nitro, WCW's four pay-per-views averaged buyrates of 0.47 and grosses of \$1,275,000.

The year on a whole was no better for the WWF. By the end of the year, the WWF was on the brink of disaster with buyrates bordering on losing money. Coming at a time when house show attendance was struggling to say the least, it appeared at the end of 1995 the WWF may not last another year or two if trends continued. Two months into 1996 there appeared to be a brief reprieve in the crashing numbers, if not an upturn in business. That upturn doesn't change the WWF's overall tenuous status or the damage Nitro did to WCW revenues late in the year.

In 1990 the WWF's average buyrate was 3.15 percent. Since then, the decline has been steady. In 1991 the buyrate was 2.34 percent, a drop of 25.7 percent compared to the previous year. In 1992 the buyrate was 1.78 percent, a drop of 24.1 percent from the previous year. In 1993 the buyrate was 1.28 percent, a drop of 27.7 percent. In 1994, the buyrates averaged 1.09 percent, dropping 15.0 percent. And 1995, with an average buyrate of 0.75, saw the biggest percentage drop of 31.5 percent.

In general, declining buyrates are nothing to be ashamed of. For whatever reason, as the pay-per-view universe (the number of homes with access to pay-per-view events) increases, buyrates have tended to decrease. That's okay because even if buyrates decrease, as long as the overall universe is increasing, revenues shouldn't go down. But buyrates for the big two have been declining faster than the expanding base of potential customers can offset.

The big two have also made two other changes in recent years—increasing the price and increasing the frequency. The biggest jump in frequency was in 1995 when both groups went monthly with their events, a jump of about 50 percent. Buyrates are an important barometer, but overall revenues are more reflective of whether the WWF is in a weak financial position.

In 1990 the WWF's estimated gross pay-per-view revenue was \$18.3 million. In 1991 it dipped a tad to \$18.1 million, a drop of

PRO WRESTLING TORCH

WWF, WCW suffer from oversaturation

In Your House buyrate estimates peg it at lowest buyrate ever... what's to blame?

By Mike Rodden, Editor

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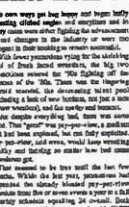
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Hulk Hogan

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years, with one big exception—the signing of Hulk Hogan. In 1990, WCW's average buyrate was 1.40 (less than half the WWF's average that year). It dropped 28 percent to 1.01 in 1991. It dropped sharply by 37.7 percent to 0.63 in 1992 and dropped again in 1993 to 0.47 a drop of 25.4 percent. The trend continued half way into 1994 until Hulk Hogan joined WCW. At that point he began headlining pay-per-views and buyrates rose considerably (although they immediately began to drop again once his initial impact lessened). As a result the average buyrate for 1994 went up 40.2 percent to 0.66 and it held steady in 1995 at 0.63.

For WCW, because of the expanding pay-per-view universe and increased price tags, revenues have gone up every year since 1991 from \$6.1 million to \$15.5 million in 1995. The jump in revenue from 1994 to 1995 was 31.9 percent, mainly because they added several pay-per-views to the schedule.

WCW should have done a lot better in increased revenues considering the additional pay-per-views added to the schedule. The primary area where WCW is subject to second guessing concerns the stress level they placed on Nitro as opposed to pay-per-view.

Had they hyped Hogan vs. Luger in a compelling fashion on Nitro rather than give it away for free so quickly, the buyrate for a pay-per-view event headlined with their first meeting would have likely eclipsed what did occur with the first meeting of Hogan vs. The Giant. Nitro also rushed into a free broadcast of Sting vs. Hogan, a tremendous "dream match" in wrestling, and drew a mere 2.5 rating, only a small bump up from their weekly average.

In fact, the concept of Nitro as a live, happening, must-see TV show may have been enough to compete with Raw without having to give away for free Hogan vs. Flair, Hogan vs. Sting, Hogan vs. Luger, Luger vs. Savage, Flair vs. Sting, and Flair vs. Savage (some more than once). But WCW raised the stakes and that forced the WWF to respond with more giveaways on Raw. All of that led to great viewership of wrestling on Monday nights, but buyrates so much smaller than they could have been had not so much been given away on TV.

It appeared WCW was hurting themselves in order to do damage to the WWF. And it worked. By the end of the year, buyrates crashed to new depths and the WWF was on the brink of not becoming number two, but perhaps becoming extinct. A small consolation is the upturn in business for both companies early in 1996.

3

DIESEL FALLS TO SPARK WWF

Given top slot all year, but revenues drop steadily

The reasons Kevin Nash was awarded the WWF Title on Nov. 26, 1993 were many.

Bret Hart, the perennial babyface champion before Diesel, was perceived as a nice, steady performer, but not one who could take the WWF to a new level. Bret also had expressed interest in leaving wrestling to more aggressively pursue his acting career. The WWF was looking for someone to take a chance on, someone who could take the WWF up a level and be around for several years to ride the wave of success.

Diesel and Shawn Michaels had become the most popular duo in recent years in the WWF. They were the headline attractions on several house show runs that drew well, especially in the Northeast. As heels they were getting better reactions than Bret Hart on many nights.

Nash had previously floundered as a lower-card gimmick wrestler in WCW under the Oz, Master Blaster, and Vinnie Vegas monikers. Vince McMahon gave him a persona that finally got him over. Nash appreciated that and in return showed strong loyalty to McMahon. He wasn't perceived by management as a problem child whose ego could spin out of control.

Nash was seen as bigger, younger, and more hip than the former WWF headliner Hulk Hogan. With Hogan headlining WCW cards, the WWF needed to combat the perception that they were the second rate group. By headlining with a "new face," it would fit better with their "New Generation" theme.

It didn't hurt that Nash is big. McMahon has always favored having his champion be the type who turns heads in airports. Hulk Hogan, Ultimate Warrior, and Yokozuna fit that bill. So did the nearly seven-foot Nash.

Nash also showed charisma and ring presence and an adequate level of skill in the ring. The belief was Diesel was everything a WWF main eventer needed to be.

So the same night Bob Backlund defeated Bret Hart under controversial circumstances, Diesel broke up with Shawn Michaels and turned babyface, ending their tag title reign. Just a few days later, fresh off of that babyface turn, the WWF had Diesel defeat Bob Backlund for the WWF Title.

Backlund's title loss came 10 years, 11 days after his last title defense at Madison Square Garden where he lost to Iron Sheik, who just weeks later would lose to Hogan. The parallels were by design. The WWF wanted as many symbolic similarities between Hogan's win and Diesel's win, hoping the symbolism would spark a similar run of success.

PRO WRESTLING TORCH

Titanic Sports: Low morale plagues WWF

McMahon makes three last-second visits to arenas to address locker room problems

By White House, Editor

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Photo by White House

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those heels, he could then begin showing vulnerability which would bring him to an even higher level as a drawing card.

Unfortunately for Diesel and the WWF, Diesel's push went down a different road. After squash wins over the hapless Backlund and failing to beat Bret decisively in his rematch, he may have been doomed no matter what, but his personality change didn't help either.

On camera, he went from an irreverent badass to a patriotic nice guy. His edge was gone and fans could sense it. Shawn Michaels kept getting the cheers from the rebellious, hip fans while Diesel was seen as a "corporate puppet," as he would describe himself at the end of the year.

Off camera, Diesel remained likable, but friends would confide that he did change. Those who hadn't spoken to him in a while found that he had a chip on his shoulder, almost seeming insecure or defensive given the pressure of the position he was in and its early lack of success. His "Clique" became unpopular among other wrestlers in the WWF which meant the locker room wasn't necessarily eager to figure out ways to "feed him wins" and help him get over.

Diesel's chance to save his reign may have been at Wrestlemania. He beat Michaels clean, but it was too late as the buyrate for the event was low. What's worse, Lawrence Taylor vs. Bam Bam Bigelow was the actual main event.

At the May "In Your House" Diesel beat Sid by DQ rather than by pinfall. It drew a poor buyrate. House show attendance was also low.

While TV ratings were great (Raw averaged a 3.63 rating in April and 3.48 in May) the product wasn't compelling viewers to spend money.

Diesel's second pinfall win in a major televised match came not until June 25 against mid-carder Tatanka in a tag match. When Diesel pinned Sid clean in a cage match at the July In Your House, Shawn Michaels was showing he was next in line as he stole Diesel's thunder with a show-stealing match against Jeff Jarrett. Meanwhile, Diesel hasn't progressed in the ring. When Diesel pinned Mabel clean at SummerSlam, it was Michaels again stealing the show with his ladder match against Ramon.

By August, after Diesel continued to fail to turn good TV ratings in pay-per-view purchases thanks to poor in-ring performances and never gaining clean momentum-generating victories over credible opponents, the wheels were in motion for Bret to regain the belt. That was step one in the plan to have Shawn Michaels beat Bret for the belt at Wrestlemania XII. Will the WWF make the same mistakes with Michaels?

The center of attention, but not necessarily an asset

6 — PRO WRESTLING 1995

5

WRESTLEMANIA XI BOMBS

L.T. generates mainstream interest, but not purchases

Everything seemed right going in. The WWF promoted the most marketable main event they had—Diesel vs. Shawn Michaels. They also featured a co-main event meant to attract fringe fans—former NFLer Lawrence Taylor vs. Bam Bigelow.

The idea of bringing in L.T. as a participating celebrity seemed to work beyond the WWF's highest expectations. L.T.'s involvement intrigued the mainstream media to the point that this Wrestlemania was among the most talked about in its eleven year history.

That intrigue didn't result in positive press, though, as the mainstream media lambasted L.T. for his involvement in wrestling. "After a Hall of Fame career with the New York Giants, the former linebacker is going to take part in a wrestling match. Before this stunt we thought just his smile was fake," wrote Rob Parker of the *Detroit Free Press*. Wrote Bob Glauder of *Newsday*: "Why go out so gallantly on that memorable afternoon at Candlestick Park... only to wind up in a silly wrestling exhibition that can't help but demean his athletic feats... But Taylor is ignoring the advice that he should continue with more reputable endeavors such as his job as an NFL analyst with TNT and a possible career as a movie actor."

Taylor responded to the criticism by saying that if what he does at Wrestlemania diminishes his NFL achievements, then "the 15 years (in the NFL) don't mean sh-- anyway."

Before Wrestlemania, that negative press was considered valuable press; after all, any publicity is good publicity as long as they get the date right. One good sign was that the television ratings increased noticeably during the considerable mainstream hype for the event.

1994's Wrestlemania X drew a 1.7 buyrate. It headlined with Lex Luger, Bret Hart, and Yokozuna in a mini-tournament for the WWF Title, plus Bret Hart vs. Owen Hart and Shawn Michaels vs. Razor Ramon in a ladder match. The strong line-up did not receive much in the way of mainstream media publicity.

The WWF expected WMXI would draw a buyrate over 2.0 and even thought they might end up bringing L.T. back for another angle and another pay-per-view match. Instead of an increase of 15 percent the buyrate dropped by 15 percent to a 1.4 percent buyrate. It seemed the bad press was not valuable press and may have even caused fringe fans to be ashamed of ordering the event. It also seemed Taylor meant less as a celebrity than the WWF hoped and banked on. Taylor, while a great football player,

PRO WRESTLING TORCH

L.T. kisses Bigelow at WM press conference

Shawn Michaels promises his greatest performance ever at Wrestlemania

BY RICHIE KELLER, Editor and Publisher

In front of dozens of reporters from all major newspapers and television outlets in the New York area, Lawrence Taylor kissed Bam Bigelow on the cheek.

The Wrestlemania XI press conference took place at the Flamingo Paradise Club in New York City. What started the momentous occasion of the two athletes shook with a similar event at the moment of press conference was the presence of Lawrence Taylor, former New York Giant football great.

One highlight for wrestling fans was Shawn Michaels' headline speech about at the event, after a commercial break.

"What I do for you here and I tell people, make people believe," Michaels said. "I want to be a professional wrestler."

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Indebted by the overwhelming mainstream press coverage, something they never did during a brief, momentous speech, Michaels said, "I want to be a professional wrestler. I want to be a professional wrestler. I want to be a professional wrestler."

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grossed in excess of \$7.2 million for the company. The buyrate of 2.0 would have returned the WWF to the buyrate they received for the 1993 Wrestlemania and the gross would have been the largest since the 1989 Wrestlemania thanks to an expanded pay-per-view universe and the price increase to \$34.95.

The optimistic explanation of the drop in buyrate was simply that the price increase from \$29.95 to \$34.95 turned off the mainstream fringe viewer who otherwise may have purchased the event.

If the WWF, by virtue of L.T. not meaning enough to get fringe viewers to buy the event and the price being too high, had to rely on just their regular customers; that meant the actual wrestling line-up had to be strong.

Compared to the previous year's Wrestlemania, the 1995 version was weak. Diesel vs. Michaels was not a dream match in the sense that neither had been established as top tier drawing cards. A dream match usually comes about from keeping two legitimate drawing cards away from each other long enough that fans eventually clamor for a match between them. Storyline-wise, this main event was more suitable for a regular pay-per-view, but was not a Wrestlemania caliber main event.

In the past, Wrestlemania has garnered its reputation through featuring big time matches. In this case, the WWF may have been banking on the reputation of Wrestlemania in general to rub off on Diesel and Michaels. In other words, they hoped the vehicle of Wrestlemania was such an established entity that anyone in its main event would instantly come across as a superstar.

Realizing that Michaels vs. Diesel wasn't a sure-fire main event, that may have been why they brought in Taylor. In fact, Taylor vs. Bigelow was the actual final match on the card. Let everyone tune in to see L.T., but come back later for more of Michaels and Diesel.

The undercard was pretty bland with Owen Hart & Yokozuna vs. The Smoking Gunns, Bret Hart underutilized against Bob Backlund, and Undertaker wasted against King Kong Bundy. The strongest undercard match may have been Jeff Jarrett vs. Razor Ramon, but it was far from a match that would set Wrestlemania apart from other WWF events.

"That's just the nature of the business," concludes McMahon. "As long as your batting average is good, you're in good shape."

That was little consolation this time considering Wrestlemania XI foreshadowed a bad 1995 overall for the WWF.

wasn't so adored by the public that they couldn't wait to see him beat up on Bigelow.

"It's a promotional business," McMahon tells the *Torch*. "That's one of the great, exciting things about this business. You never know what's gonna work until you try it. What went wrong? We had a publicity machine like never before churning out word about the event. I was expecting more. It's safe to say (L.T.'s presence) wasn't a turn-on factor. I don't know if it was a turn off factor, though."

Besides Taylor not attracting fringe viewers, Bigelow may not have meant enough to the wrestling or mainstream public either. Bigelow had never received what amounted to a major push and wasn't the type of heel who had genuine heat where fans couldn't wait to see him get his butt whipped.

What doubled the disappointment wasn't just that the buyrate fell well below expectations, but this show was supposed to be the launching pad for Diesel and Michaels to move into stardom and become drawing cards on their own.

As it turned out, it was the first major sign of what became apparent throughout the year—Diesel would not be the franchise wrestler they were hoping he would be. When word of the poor buyrate came in, the WWF began hotshotting angles including turning Michaels babyface much earlier than expected, breaking him up with bodyguard Sid just a short time after they had gotten together.

The poor buyrate was a financial blow to the WWF. Had it drawn a 2.0 buyrate, it would have

12 hours of fighting causes quite a stir in the U.S.

8 — PRO WRESTLING 1995

Watts doesn't last, struggle for power ensues

Pat Patterson had grown into a comfortable relationship with Vince McMahon. Both knew the roles the other played. McMahon was the dominant leader and Patterson was the largely passive assistant, who contributed ideas, refined storylines, and relayed booking concepts to the wrestlers with a smile. He often played the good

What Watts has never liked is being

What Watts has never liked is being

With Patterson gone, it forced the WWF to take a different approach with booking. By the end of the year, the philosophy of promoting to kids was replaced by a more hardcore, adult-oriented approach. As 1996 began, business took an upturn. That led to some sense of stability and less second-guessing. The rise of Shawn Michaels as a legitimate drawing card and the filling of the booking void by Cornette gave the WWF the early stages of a foundation—sans Pat Patterson—to build upon.

ECW'S INFLUENCE GROWS

Can ECW mature and take advantage of strengths

What has made ECW the most copied promotional internationally? And is the emulation of ECW a good thing?

Relative to its annual revenues, probably below \$1 million in 1995, ECW gets more attention than any promotion globally. Besides full color coverage of many of their cards in the massively circulated Japanese weekly magazines, and besides generous coverage in U.S. magazines and newsletters, and besides Web pages and internet sites dedicated to the promotion, other wrestlers and promoters have taken notice of the promotion.

ECW has not received all positive press or feedback. Their motto "It's not for everyone" holds true, as some people see ECW house shows as a bunch of brawling among wrestlers who would get lost one minute into a WWF style match, who rely on guts, hard work, gimmickry, and a vocal crowd to disguise what mostly is a "garbage" style of wrestling (i.e. not technically sound). Of course, that view isn't entirely accurate, but it's not entirely inaccurate either.

ECW house shows do have their fair share of hardcore brawling, but promoters Paul Heyman and Tod Gordon have worked hard to bring a semblance of variety to the cards, including promoting an old-style 60 minute draw between Shane Douglas and Tully Blanchard early in the year; the two wrestlers were booed out of the building after that effort and Douglas's reputation was hurt. Eddie Guerrero and Dean Malenko "came from nowhere" to have the most technically superior series of matches in the States in years. Thanks to educated, dedicated announcing, great television promotion, and headliners who encouraged rather than sabotaged the success of that style of wrestling, ECW found that a variety of very different styles of wrestling on one card can create a synergy.

When Guerrero and Malenko left, a new synergy was created when Rey Misterio Jr. and Psicosis were brought in on the next card. They showed off a polished lucha libre style that dazzled and awed the crowd.

Elsewhere on the card there were Dudley Boys hitting each other with crutches while stuttering their names, Sandman whacking people with his cane, Tommy Dreamer getting cheers for piledriving women, Raven trying to control his hanger-on Stevie Richards, and The Gangstas being driven through tables by The Public Enemy.

The building that is ECW Arena is lifeless if not pitiful on nights without wrestling. But the fans, wrestlers, and music bring the building

PRO WRESTLING TORCH

ECW, Heyman, Gordon reach crossroads

Aggressiveness of expansion and in-ring extreme style begins to be questioned by some

[illegible][illegible]

Answer #1: As it stands now, Ted Cronin is not taking part in the day-to-day operating activities of BCW. Whether or not it can be so established in Cronin's departure, the vesting event on the weekend of May 10-11 without Cronin was full of logistical problems. Some weather didn't have legal work resolved. Others while the NBA trips came due to paperwork with various taking place without any, we shouldn't even reporting the art of re-employment, many wantons have thrown the hands up, saying it's too much. Many say BCW vesting has surprised a warm to many persons and each other that the product is moving in the right direction.

[illegible]

IS AMERICA EVENT SPOTLIGHT?
Millennium Moments captures Triple Crown '88 from Doc Hoseney... pg. 7

IT'S NEWSWORTHY
WCW's Austin, Anderson score wins on New Japan cards... pg. 7

versions of the press regarding the status of the company or its ownership. Both confirm that they remain persons in NJW as it was once known, but now a holding company called NJO. Joe has taken over the financial aspects of paying off debts and handling paychecks. It is believed he is also ECW's main cheerleader since he's been airing it on TV after work just some more forward that image—and turn off every person.

The weather is ECW way to make people not just be worried about being a hardcore

60° PLEASE SEE ECW STATUS REPORT, pg. 10

alive. That spectacular energy has enamored the

international wrestling community.

Konnan looked to ECW as a role model for his Baja California AAA subsidiary. The WW

... saw that the twenty-something male audience
... ably loved ECW and gave its own produ...

the ban on use of foreign objects and encouraging more brawling at ringside plus

replacing the Doink type characters with more hip, irreverent personas. WCW Uncensored

debuted in 1994 and attempted to pick up on what made ECW popular, although put out

laughable imitation where cotton candy
substituted for frying pans as the weapon of
choice. By the end of the year, IWCW became

blood back to national television after a long hiatus and saw buyrates and television ratings

perhaps not coincidentally jump. Both the WWF and WCW went after some of ECW's top talent

including The Public Enemy, Malenko, Guerrero, Chris Benoit, and Shane Douglas.

ECW isn't all house show presentation as i

TV show defines ECW as much as its ECW

Are you a house show? The TV show is a

arena house shows. The TV show, too, has its staunch fans and its vociferous critics. The critics see the show as a series of long

interviews, music videos with music they don't necessarily like, lots of swearing bleeped out, a

insanely rabid and often disrespectful crowd
and an arrogant squirt of an announcer taking

shots at the competition any chance he gets while screaming "Oh my god!" so often he

makes Dick Vitale seem measured.

Fans of the program see it as an unpredictable show, without a set format, featuring mainly ECW Arena highlights. Producer Paul Heyman was not scared to dedicate the first thirty minutes of a show to a sit-down interview with Shane Douglas or an entire hour to one match between Guerrero and Malenko, or feature a one hour show with no matches, but instead highlights interviews, recap features, and music videos.

The TV show's format has not been copied, but production techniques have been. Bells and whistles that begin on ECW TV often end up showing up a few weeks later on WWF and WCW television, be it the tilting camera during interviews or a silly sound effect before going to replays of finishing moves.

The whole ECW craze begs a question: Why are people copying a promotion that has not exactly taken over its genre in the sense that *E.R.*, *X-Files*, and *Friends* took over their genre? If ECW is so worthy of being copied, why aren't they on national pay-per-view? The founders of the equally young UFC are raking in millions in merchandising, pay-per-view revenues, and video tape distribution. Meanwhile, ECW has been relatively sluggish in growth and an administrative nightmare. Neither Tod Gordon nor Paul Heyman can give a definitive answer as to who actually owns ECW if legal push were to come to legal shove between them.

Yet as small as ECW is, they seem unable to handle the business they have. If they're not consumed with trying to eek by fire regulations to fit a few dozen extra people into their arena, they are trying to figure out which video tape orders from a few months earlier have yet to be fulfilled. Sometimes customers ordered tickets and didn't receive them until after the show or are where they have been mailed out when they hadn't been. Their reputation has spread to where they have probably lost opportunities with sponsors, television stations, and maybe even pay-per-view distributors.

But at least ECW is an aesthetic success, right? Yes, but then again Heyman is so determined to push the envelope to the nth degree that he may be closing doors and opportunities for quicker expansion. His creative drive to be as different and daring as possible may not always be compatible with running a business that grows at the rate it should. Without some creative restraint and a more mature, major-league business approach, ECW may remain a small revenue promotion. If their business approach were as state of the art as their TV product, ECW would become a rich promotion.

Modern marketplace put an end to Cornette's dream

PRO WRESTLING 1995 — 11

10

WCW EXPANDS TALENT BASE

A variety of newcomers strengthen undercard, future

In this era of wrestling there are fewer and fewer sources for new talent. Without dozens of territories churning out new talent every year, many fear that the stream of necessary new talent needed to replace retiring wrestlers and invigorate stale rosters will not be enough to keep the industry healthy. The big two promotions have taken two very different grass roots routes to developing talent.

WCW has acquired new talent in three key ways: (1) Hiring talent from smaller promotions, mainly wrestlers from ECW (i.e. Chris Benoit, Eddie Guerrero, and Dean Malenko); (2) Using Japanese (i.e. Kensuke Sasaki, Kurosawa) and Americans (i.e. Scott Norton, Sabu) from New Japan Pro Wrestling; (3) And developing talent themselves through their "Power Plant" training center. The WWF has shied away from bringing in outside talent without a well-defined gimmick first which tends to limit who they bring in and stunt many they do. Rather than have their own training center, the WWF has had loose relationships with the USWA and the late SMW and even attempted to establish one with ECW. That approach hasn't worked out quite as well as neither the USWA nor SMW were set up to develop talent; instead, some talent has developed by chance but not by design.

WCW has quietly become a solid grooming area for talent in the United States. With Jody Hamilton and Terry Taylor running the WCW training center, their crowning jewel is The Giant, who learned wrestling from scratch at the training center. Another up-and-comer is Bobby Walker who started at the training center. Although like any training center there are more drop-outs than success stories.

The WCW training center has also worked toward refining the skills of wrestlers with limited experience and a desire to get better. Jean Paul Levesque, now Hunter Hearst Helmsley in the WWF, had limited experience in the Northeast before coming to WCW. He became a good worker due to dedicated training sessions at the Power Plant. Johnny B. Badd and Diamond Dallas Page are five or ten times the workers they were before working hard at the training center. Alex Wright, like several other WCW wrestlers with great potential, has worked out off and on at the training center to improve his skills. WCW has also tapped into the Tampa wrestling area which has a rich history of producing talent, including the Malenkos. It's where 1-2-3 Kid grew up and learned the basics. At times in recent years the group of Tampa-based talent, including the progressing

PRO WRESTLING TORCH

WCW renews relationship with New Japan

\$2,500 bill the Tokyo Dome for New Japan's biggest annual event to see Hashimoto defend

BY JIMMY KILLIP, STAFF WRITER

Two weeks ago, New Japan Pro Wrestling (NJPW) announced that it would be returning to the United States for the first time in 15 years. The reason was simple: WCW vice president Eric Bischoff, who had been in Japan for several years, had decided to bring the promotion back to the States. Bischoff, who had been in Japan for several years, had decided to bring the promotion back to the States. Bischoff, who had been in Japan for several years, had decided to bring the promotion back to the States.

TORCH HIGHLIGHTS...

NEW JAPAN PRO WRESTLING
Full results of New Japan's Monday Night New Year Special... pp. 2
AMERICA EVENT SPOILER
From starting invasion last month, up to UNATURAL BOSSING, ECW's surprise after Christmas match event... pp. 7
WCW RECAP
Am Anderson captures the WCW TV Title on the New Year's Eve... pp. 3
TORCH TALK
Al Snow discusses the state of the wrestling industry... pp. 5

...and other...
...and other...
...and other...

...and other...
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...and other...

against each other on pay-per-view would sell the event. Chris Benoit was eventually placed in the Four Horsemen, but his lack of interview experience held him back a bit, as did the strange path Brian Pillman's character eventually took.

WCW focused so much on matches with Lex Luger, Sting, Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage, Ric Flair, Arn Anderson, and the Dungeon of Doom, that the line drawn between that top group of wrestlers and the next layer was so great, it was as if WCW was two promotions.

Make that three promotions. At the end of the year, WCW admirably attempted to incorporate the rich talent base of Japan into their storylines, basing the undercard of Starrcade on New Japan wrestlers facing WCW wrestlers. The lack of ability to turn the talent of Guerrero and Malenko into a drawing feud was amplified with their style of promoting New Japan wrestlers. Rather than take a more progressive approach and stress the athletic elements of the potential matches, they focused the feud on anti-Japan sentiment, which didn't exactly burn up Ticketmaster's phone lines.

With UFC educating wrestling fans to submission holds and the art of match strategies, WCW could have seized that by building up the Japanese wrestlers as perhaps "the opposing team" without plastering them with the Japanese stereotypes and the horribly embarrassing Sonny Ono character. When the UWF took Japan by storm with its shoot-style matches, the major leagues in Japan responded by changing their product and they saw their business go up.

Wrestlers such as Benoit and Shinjiro Otani are dazzling and well-rounded workers, but they aren't in the mold of Junkyard Dog so they need to be promoted in a new-age way that builds around their athleticism rather than interview skills. If an honest effort were made to promote wrestlers such as Guerrero and Malenko and Otani as title contenders, WCW would be twice as strong a promotion. If WCW keeps waiting for the next Ultimate Warrior to come around, all the while underplaying Eddie Guerrero who is standing right in front of them, they are missing a prime opportunity.

WCW in 1994 took important first steps to building toward the future, but they haven't shown enough signs of taking the next step and effectively promoting those stars by playing to their strengths instead of dwelling on their weaknesses. Even so, with wrestlers like Guerrero and Malenko around, it can only help accelerate the development of future potential stars such as Kanyon, Starr, Wright, and Walker.

Mark Starr and rookie of the year contender Chris Kanyon, have gained seasoning at several small independent shows per week in the Tampa area and doing jobs at WCW TV tapings.

When Kevin Sullivan became booker, based on his recent stay working close with Paul Heyman and Tod Gordon in ECW, he saw the value in putting on great matches for the sake of putting on great matches, just to up the level of athleticism. Sullivan also wanted to be popular in the vocal hardcore community for bringing in talent of quality such as Guerrero, Malenko, and Benoit. WCW management were more open to the concept in part because it would hurt ECW which had been so vocal in their criticism of WCW.

That said, once those wrestlers entered WCW they didn't make the type of splash they could have—perhaps by design. At first, it was especially frustrating watching wrestlers of their talent level be just thrown into the ring with no character development or perspective on what their match meant. They weren't put into title contention or feuds, and they didn't get any meaningful interview time. Their early matches were either especially short and even interrupted by the "breaking news" that "Hulk Hogan has arrived at the building."

That treatment changed a few weeks into the run. WCW Saturday Night featured extensive sit-down interviews with Guerrero and Malenko as a way to build up their feud, but that honest effort to give them an identity never got rolling to the point where WCW felt featuring them

11-50

THE REST OF TOP 50

A Brief Look at Other Top Stories

- 11 Eddie Gilbert, John Studd die at young ages
- 12 Kevin Sullivan replaces Flair as WCW booker
- 13 AAA fails to build on momentum from 1994
- 14 Ric Flair returns from so-called retirement
- 15 Michaels attacked by thugs, leads to major angle
- 16 Vader fired from WCW, negotiates with WWF
- 17 Lex Luger jumps to WCW, surprise Nitro debut
- 18 Booking at Sept. 24 IYH drives away customers
- 19 Hogan changes his persona without success
- 20 Dustin Rhodes becomes controversial Goldust
- 21 NBC pulls planned Wrestlemania pre-event special
- 22 Sabu unable to assimilate into WCW
- 23 Blood returns to national promotions in December
- 24 Dan Severn wins NWA Title, then UFC5 tourney
- 25 Hogan-Sting dream match draws minimal interest
- 26 WWF accused of shady dealings during '94 trial
- 27 ECW fires headliner Sabu for skipping appearance
- 28 Royce Gracie ceases participation in UFC events
- 29 WCW's Giant shows signs of being mega-star
- 30 Ric Flair wins WCW Title again at Starrcade
- 31 Bret Hart begins another title reign at Survivors
- 32 Jim Ross becomes member of WWF booking staff
- 33 Okerlund's sleazy 900 come-ons get national play
- 34 UFC dreammatch Gracie-Shamrock ends in draw
- 35 USWA-SMW sparks USWA, less so SMW
- 36 Sandman wins ECW Title, becomes ECW headliner
- 37 Jeff Jarrett, Roadie walk out on WWF contracts
- 38 Steve Austin fired by WCW, goes to ECW, then WWF
- 39 Jim Barnett long run in power ends, released by WCW
- 40 Michaels wins Rumble, confirms his pending push
- 41 Blanchard returns, booed in 60 min. draw vs. Douglas
- 42 First Hogan vs. Vader takes place at SuperBrawl
- 43 Marco Ruas wins UFC7, the second coming of Gracie?
- 44 WCW puts on laughable hardcore Uncensored event
- 45 Race disappears from national scene after accident
- 46 Jerry Blackwell dies after years away from wrestling
- 47 New Jack center of controversy in SMW, then ECW
- 48 Morton fired from SMW after fight with Smothers
- 49 Dundee fired from USWA after pulling knife on Wolfie
- 50 Giant "falls off roof of arena" at Havoc, wrestles later

The deaths of both Eddie Gilbert and John Studd may have been related to steroid and human growth hormone use. Their deaths along with Art Barr's in 1993 sparked a feature on ABC's Wide World of Sports focusing on the pattern of young wrestlers with backgrounds using drugs dying at a rapid rate... After Hulk Hogan won his power struggle with Ric Flair, Sullivan was seen as an innocuous replacement. Sullivan may have relied on old tricks past their years of effectiveness, but also contributed to some positive roster changes. His booking of constant run-in finishes to Nitro main events lacked creativity and may have hurt ratings over the long run, but overall, ratings were solid during his tenure... Antonio Pena was more worried about his battle with Mexican rival promoter Paco Alonzo of EMLL, plus he had to contend with the devaluation of the Peso. Without Ron Skoler to push for more shows, the U.S. expansion was set aside. In 1993-'94 five AAA shows drew an average of 12,833 (\$204,812) while in 1995 they ran only two shows and averaged 6,000 (\$114,149) due to poor promoting... Ric Flair swore he wasn't gonna be like everyone else and return from retirement, yet all along he knew he was coming back. Everyone knew it too... It is far from the best thing to ever happen to Shawn Michaels personally, but being attacked outside a nightclub late one night and being hospitalized spurred an angle that launched him into a successful angle leading into 1996 and his likely Wrestlemania title victory... Vader's fight with Paul Orndorff after a WCW TV taping (and losing the fight)

could be the best thing that happened to the WWF for 1996... Lex Luger's jump immediately put Monday Nitro on the map as a must-see show. He also gave WCW a fresh face to what otherwise may have been a more stale mix of top names... IYH buyrates averaged 0.74 before the Sept. 24 IYH and the next two did 0.40 and 0.33. Who says one horribly booked show can't drive away customers? The finish to the Diesel & Michaels vs. Hart & Yokozuna match was among the WWF's worst booking miscues of the year... Desperate men do desperate things. Now we know where Eric Bischoff came up with that line. Was the obviously sniffling, running nose part of that new heel persona or was it just cold season?... Goldust—the next Undertaker or Papa Shango? Stay tuned... WWF on the verge of being acceptable in the mainstream again, but higher-ups at NBC say, "What? That crap's not airing on our network!" and pull the WWF's special... Sabu, like ECW, could have profited from compromise... Blood returns to both national promotions late in the year. WWF says it was an accident, WCW blades away... Dan Severn gave UFC a nice guy poster champion and made amateur wrestlers everywhere proud... Probably among the three most anticipated potential matches in 1990 doesn't mean a thing to the Monday Nitro TV ratings probably because Hogan turned into a joke and the match-up was rushed with little hype... Don't think you've heard the last of Marty Bergman or the TitanGate scandals... ECW shows it is not built around one performer... UFC shows it is not built around one performer. Gracie says rule changes have

blemished competition and now inherently favor bigger fighters... A Giant with great athletic skill and only 24 years old. The Shaq of pro wrestling?... Flair's popularity demands he keep a top spot even in late 40s... Bret Hart plays relief pitcher for Diesel... Jim Ross, the cat with nine lives, finds a bridge not burned... How can Mean Gene look at himself in the mirror? Oh, it's an expensive mirror bought with his 900 scam checks. Now I understand... Dream match draw prompts boring chants and rule changes... SMW needed a spark more than the USWA... Who would have thought this guy could make ECW fans say, "Sabu who?"... They hold their ground against McMahon, but we're still not sure over what? But the song was cool!... When will Austin fulfill his potential? When will he be given the chance?... Barnett, one of the most influential promoters of the last 50 years, finally disappears from the scene. People still imitate his voice, though... Michaels already outshining good friend Diesel... Paul Heyman's ECW Arena Midas touch suffers set back... If it were a shoot, who would have won? Yeah, not so obvious anymore, is it? Hulk beat Orndorff, remember... Marco, still demanding a recount... Headline reads: "Four men assaulted with cotton candy and piece of cardboard"... Don't get injured while working for WCW because you have a way of not returning... Blackwell, one of the better big men of his era, dies after a sad final few years... New Jack pushes envelope. Is it a work or a shoot? Both... Can't we all just get along?... Respect your elders, even if they pull a knife on you... WCW is still blushing...

PRO WRESTLING TORCH

1995

AWARDS

The following pages feature the results of the eighth annual Pro Wrestling Torch Awards poll. The results were compiled from hundreds of ballots from Torch readers across the world. A first place vote received 3 points, a second place vote 2 points, and a third place vote 1 point. The percentage of the total number of points received is next to each of the top five finishers. This year's list of the top ten vote getters is followed by a list of the top three winners in past years' polls. Reader comments on awards are then followed by columnists' and editor's picks...

1. AMERICAN MVP

Shawn Michaels

AWARD COMMENTS

Chris Conroy: Shawn Michaels is the only reason I ordered the pay-per-views I ordered throughout the year. He carried Diesel to a good match at Wrestlemania and had the match of the year in my opinion against Razor Ramon at SummerSlam. Ric Flair, who along with Arn Anderson, is the only credible heel in WCW did all he could to put over the WCW faces and deserves recognition for that. Bret Hart kept the Michaels-less WWF going with his performance at IYH against the British Bulldog. By going against Backlund, Lawler, Lafitte, and Hakushi for most of the year, his title victory was fresh and deserved. However neither Flair nor Hart had the type of year Michaels had.

Brian Keenan: Eddie Guerrero has taken over Rick Steamboat's former position as the classiest act in the business.

Tom Quinn: Shawn Michaels gets the first spot for being the most charismatic and best skilled worker in the WWF. He started the year with a bang by winning the Royal Rumble, won the IC Title, had another five star ladder match with Razor Ramon, and finished the year by turning a giant negative into a great angle. Diesel gets second for being the only credible champion either one of the big two offered for most of the year. He added to almost every WWF title match by making a title change seem possible. Third goes to the former ECW Champion Mikey Whipwreck. Who would have thought that this kid would go from jobber to one of the most exciting, charismatic, and hardest workers in any North American promotion? Mikey really came into his own in 1995.

Tom Mansour: Shawn Michaels, absolutely the number one man in the business in 1995.

Eric Meringer: From winning the Royal Rumble to carrying Diesel to a good match at Wrestlemania to the fabulous matches with Jeff Jarrett and Razor Ramon to his giving up of the Intercontinental Title and his collapsing on Raw, he proves why he is the greatest wrestler in the world.

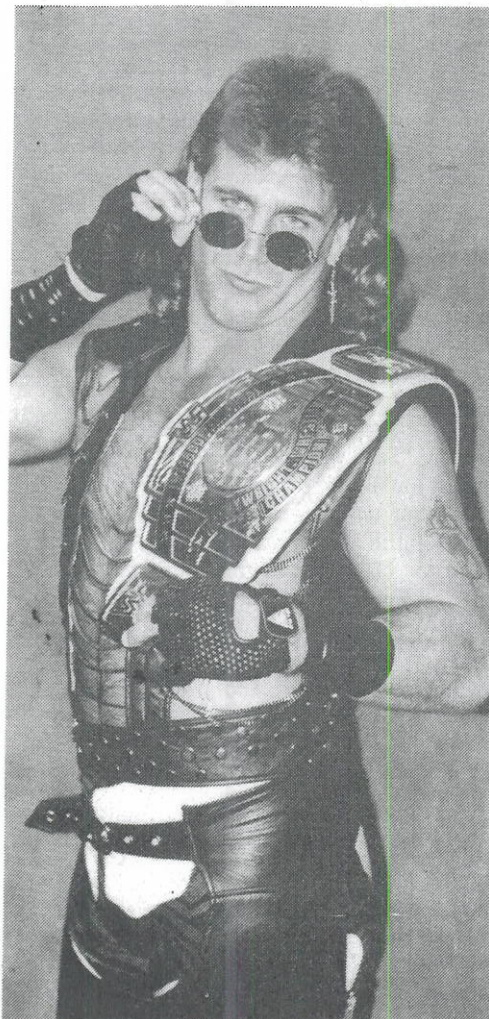
Jason Amari: Shawn Michaels brings back the charisma and the electricity in the ring and behind the microphone that the sport seemed to lack for quite some time. Six years ago, who would have thought that one half of a mid-card tag team would develop into such a megastar?

Jason Husby: This was the year of Shawn Michaels. He wins MVP hands down. Bret Hart had a good year, despite the talent that was given him to work with. Cactus Jack was the glue ECW needed this year when everyone else jumped to the big two.

Marshall Goldberg: From beginning to end, I thought Sting had the most good matches, best interviews, and was in the limelight more than any top star. Shawn was out of action too much to get the number one spot.

David Frey: What did Shawn Michaels do wrong in 1995? Best workrate, best match, best angle—heck he probably helped put up the ring, too.

Mike Fahey: Shawn Michaels is the obvious choice. WWF pay-per-views suffered greatly in his absence and when he was involved, his matches were always the best on the cards. It's time to christen him champion now.



Shawn Michaels

Photo by Jerry Wilson

Steve Yohe: The title of MVP would seem to mean that the winner was someone who helped his company make money. The only wrestler who starred for a successful promotion is Ken Wayne Shamrock. Before he's done, he'll probably be remembered as pro wrestling's greatest shooter. Unlike the great shooters of the past—like Karl Gotch, Lou Thesz, and Strangler Lewis—Shamrock didn't make his reputation shooting in a gym. He's doing it on pay-per-view in front of millions. I would have put Royce Gracie on the list, but he spent most of the year hiding. Michaels had a great year but Hart is still the foundation of the WWF.

Robert O'Connor: Shawn Michaels was the obvious choice for MVP. His pay-per-view matches with Diesel, Jeff Jarrett, and Razor Ramon were all very good to excellent. I thought the Raw angle was great. I guess it's been so long since anyone has even remotely "believed" that people are actually offended when an angle seems "too realistic." It's to Michaels's credit that so many people thought his collapse was a shoot. I'd hate to imagine Hulk Hogan trying to pull off the same angle.

Adam Hopkins: Shawn Michaels had crowds in the palms of his hands whenever he was in a match. He always put forth a 100 percent effort whether it was a house show or a TV taping. Bret Hart stayed strong by having good to excellent matches this year even though the focus was not primarily on him. And what else can be said about Ric Flair? The man is a true professional and was a pleasure to watch whenever he was on camera. He seemed genuinely excited when he won the belt, even if it was just for a little while.

Brian Yursha: Shawn Michaels is my top pick because all of his matches are entertaining and he was in two of the best matches—ladder match vs. Ramon and IYH against Jarrett. He is an incredible athlete who takes excellent bumps and all of his interviews are always great. He is also a great color commentator. I can't wait for him to be WWF champion. Bret Hart is next for his workrate on pay-per-view matches. Ric Flair gets third for having some great matches this year.

Keith Legaz: Initially it was a toss-up between Sabu and Shawn Michaels. However, since MVP includes fan appeal, I had to nominate Michaels as my top choice. His flamboyance, charisma, and especially his wide exposure have undoubtedly overshadowed Sabu in the U.S. in 1995.

Tim Dills: Shawn Michaels had a very solid year with plenty of memorable moments including his Royal Rumble performance, SummerSlam's ladder match, and forfeiture of the IC belt. He gets the no. 1 nod. Ric Flair takes second because he seemingly is the only person WCW fans care about. Eddy Guerrero takes no. 3 for an incredible ECW run and for having some of WCW's best matches in years.

- 1. Shawn Michaels (49%)**
- 2. Bret Hart (13%)**
- 3. Eddie Guerrero (5%)**
- 4. Ric Flair (5%)**
- 5. Diesel (4%)**

6-15) Sting, Sandman, Razor Ramon, Cactus Jack, Ken Wayne Shamrock

PAST WINNERS:

- 1994: B. Hart, Flair, Michaels**
1993: Vader, Flair, Hart, Sting
1992: Flair, Rude, Hart
1991: Flair, Hart, Cactus Jack
1990: Flair, Hulk Hogan, Sting
1989: Flair, Terry Funk, Lex Luger
1988: Flair, Ted DiBiase, Savage

Pat & Dan Enright: Eddie Guerrero just seems to become more and more popular in WCW. His matches on Nitro are usually the best and, of course, the shortest. Here's to hoping WCW uses him properly.

Shawn "The New Ric Flair" Michaels was far and away the main reason I enjoyed the WWF in 1995. Jeff Jarrett was 1995's only decent heel in the big two. And Cactus Jack, the eerie overlord of the independents, gave ECW big time credibility.

Bruno Arteago: Shawn Michaels is by far the best at making a fair match great.

David Goldberg: Nobody is more deserving of the MVP award than Shawn Michaels. No higher ranking wrestler worked harder, showed more charisma, or brought more fan interest than Michaels. He even had a great showing against a mediocre Diesel. Michaels also shows a lot of guts for wrestling such a great match at the Survivor Series and taking many bumps only weeks after the Syracuse incident. Hopefully Michaels will continue to perform at the same level. He is definitely the number one reason to watch WWF wrestling, while Goldust is the number one reason not to watch WWF wrestling.

R.D. Murray: Shawn Michaels. Looks, highspots, charisma, talent. He has everything.

Ted Bauer: Number one here easily goes to Shawn Michaels. Every time he did or said something in 1995 he was entertaining, beginning with his minute-long dance at the Royal Rumble and going all the way through his compelling post-concussion angle. He had four-star matches with Ramon and Jarrett, and at King of the Ring he made Kama look good. Number two goes to Cactus Jack for the most incredible interviews ever uttered. Number three goes to Bret Hart, the stable force of the WWF in a time of low morale and bad buyrates, including a show-saver on occasion, such as IYH3.

Brian Diericks: I don't see how Shawn could not get picked for MVP. His combination of charisma, workrate, and interview skills is second to none in the U.S. and perhaps the world. Bret Hart gets second because he consistently performs well and is still very popular.

Aron DeMars: I know it, I know it. That bald-headed, orange-skinned, insecure, egomaniacal, steroid-infested has-been knows it: Shawn Michaels was the best thing happening on the U.S. scene. Although I do think he works better as a heel. He is the "next Ric Flair." He and Bret Hart are gonna put on a show at Wrestlemania.

Jeffrey Cohen: Shawn Michaels broke out this year to be the WWF wrestler, surpassing Bret Hart.

Barry Johnson: No one on the American wrestling scene had the impact that the charismatic, diligent, self-sacrificing Heartbreak Kid had in 1995. If each wrestling company had five of him, the sport would be as popular as pro football and the athletes might actually be respected for the work they do.

Mike Malesev: Shawn Michaels gave a five-star effort in every bout he had, plus great interviews and his growing charisma. Eddie Guerrero gives 100 percent in all of his bouts plus his outstanding and breathtaking moves makes him a pleasure to watch. Hulk Hogan is still the most known wrestler around plus he had decent bouts plus helped WCW become more popular than the WWF.

Peter Parrotta: Obviously Shawn Michaels gets this award. He's carried much lesser athletes to superb matches. Every angle that he participated in during 1995 was so realistic. He's the most over wrestler in the WWF. I don't think I know anyone who dislikes him. Shane Douglas gets no. 2 because of the way he continued to use his mouth in ECW. He could be of such help in the WWF's new "hardcore" ways but the WWF ignored his ability. Shane needs ECW. Mikey Whipwreck gets no. 3 for how lovable he is. Even hardcores can't hate him.

John Magee: Shawn Michaels gets the slight nod over Bret Hart for the excitement he brings to both live and televised events. Diesel gets a vote just for the effort he tried to make with some inferior opponents much of the year.

John Lister: Shawn Michaels came close to achieving his obvious goal of having the match of the night at every show he wrestled on. Guerrero destroyed the myth that ECW was pure violence and even made WCW worth watching albeit with the mute button on. Sandman defined ECW's attitude perfectly and his outrageous alcohol induced tope and plancha attempts highlighted many a show.

Annette Boyer: It was the year of the Heartbreak Kid. From his performance at the Rumble to his angle driven collapse on Raw, the spotlight never left Michaels.

Tony Martin: Shawn Michaels is so far above the competition when you include workrate, interviews, and charisma they should put the belt on him at Wrestlemania.

R. McMahon: Shawn Michaels was the man this year in all of wrestling. Bret Hart wasn't spectacular, but he held his ground. Sabu is just plain crazy.

Aaron Simmons: If anyone can bring pro wrestling out of its rut and into unscaled popularity, Shawn Michaels is the man. His Royal Rumble performance, matches with Diesel, Jarrett, and Ramon (especially) have begun foreshadowing the undeniable return of the bruised industry. If WCW decides to make Eddie Guerrero their no. 1 man, they may possibly become the top promotion.

Matt Grady: Shawn Michaels, Bret Hart, and Ric Flair. Michaels was the best in the U.S. this year. He had several great matches with Jeff Jarrett, Razor Ramon, and at the Royal Rumble. He really deserves the title in 1996. Hart was not the focus in the WWF this year. He was still the most over wrestler in the promotion anyway and should carry the WWF into 1996. Flair had one of the worst years of his career in 1995, but he was still better than anyone else and he is the most valuable wrestler in WCW.

Eric McHugh: Shawn Michaels is the best wrestler in the U.S. and will be the leader of the WWF into the 21st century. Bret "I abhor ECW—now excuse me as I crash through this table and blade" Hart continued to carry every lousy opponent he had in 1995 to another level. Eddie Guerrero and Dean Malenko tie for third for making ECW known as the no. 1 wrestling organization in the country while having the best series of matches since Steamboat vs. Flair in 1989.

Oscar Dronjak: Michaels generated more interest than any other wrestler and has been in focus all year, despite not winning the world title as everyone expected. Guerrero is a safe second considering the way he was loved by the ECW fans and the response he got in the crowded HCW (Hogan Championship Wrestling). They both work very hard in the ring and are not afraid to take some serious bumps.

Joshua Christie: Shawn Michaels, Bret Hart, and Owen Hart. If you look up "The New WWF Generation" in the dictionary, you will see a picture of Shawn Michaels. He proved beyond any shadow of a doubt that he is ready to become the most popular, charismatic, and longest reigning WWF Champion of all time. Shawn truly set the standard that all else should follow. Bret Hart continued to give well above average performances by taking B-show talent such as Hakushi and Jean Pierre Lafitte to great matches. Owen Hart worked hard all year and showed that, if given the opportunity, he has all the ability needed to follow in Bret's footsteps as WWF Champion.

Carl Arnold: Shawn Michaels is simply the best. His attitude was better as a heel, but he more than makes up for it with his charisma.

Jason Hawkins: Shawn Michaels, Ric Flair, and Sting. Michaels continued to be all of the sizzle in the WWF. Flair's return from forever retirement proved how very important he is to WCW. Sting was solid all year as a big part of WCW.

James Zordani: Bret Hart took part in several terrific bouts in the second half of 1995. Hart saved his best performances for the big matches. His efforts against Jean Pierre Lafitte, Davey Boy Smith, Hakushi, and even Diesel were among the best matches of the year. Shawn Michaels gave two show-stopping performances in 1995 against Razor Ramon and Jeff Jarrett. When in the ring with a decent opponent, Shawn is the best in the U.S. Eddie Guerrero was outstanding during his stay in ECW and later in the year in WCW. Week after week Eddie stole the show on Nitro, capped off with his match against Shinjiro Otani.

John Molinaro: Eddie Guerrero was by far the best worker in the U.S. over the past year. His workrate was unparalleled and he had several matches of the year candidates.

Gary Miller: Michaels is the best in the U.S. today. I have seen him in person a few times and he never disappoints. He knows how to take great bumps and has great interviews with a good workrate.

Chris Zavisa: Whether he was the crowd favorite against Sandman in the first half of the year, or whether he stood his image on its head and turned the hardcore fans against him as in the latter part of the year, there was no single person as interesting to watch and listen to as Cactus Jack. When ECW lost Sabu, I thought it was going to be a tough year but Cactus came through in high style.

Shawn Michaels is the most popular personality in the WWF and the most talented as well. It was no coincidence that most of the big matches and big moments in that promotion revolved around him. Now 1996 should really be his year.

Sandman defies all logic, reason, and sense. He is not very good in the ring, has to get tanked before he can work, and needs a manager who really cannot talk in the ring. But time after time he comes through with a big match, a string of "Oh my God" suicidal bumps, and his own personal collection of craziness. It would be difficult to imagine ECW in 1995 without his contributions.

Bruce Mitchell: Ken Shamrock, the star and top performer of the sport's fastest growing promotion. Shamrock is the breakout story of the year. And Shamrock was a very effective media representative at a time when his sport needed one most.

Bret Hart gets second. Diesel got the push, but Bret's consistency made him the backbone of Titan Sports again this year. He can be counted on

to have very good to great matches with non-dentists on every pay-per-view.

Shawn Michaels is third. The charisma and aura of a true star, in an era particularly lacking in them. He is a great performer now, but he needs a year without one of the ring problems and with performances that live up to his very high potential.

John Williams: In 1995, Ken Shamrock and Dan Severn offered further proof of grappling's superiority in the world of martial arts. The two provided the backbone of the only pay-per-view promotion that is not showing signs of either decline or stagnation. Shamrock rates first for his defense of his profession when it became the center of a socio-political firestorm. In a debate created by misrepresentation, half-truths, and ignorance, Ken Shamrock combatted the grandstanding with the novel concept of telling the truth and presenting facts. It's hard to remember the last time the words truth and facts could be applied to the world of professional wrestling.

Wade Keller: Shawn Michaels, Ric Flair, Razor Ramon. Michaels stepped up in 1995 from a good small-man heel turned babyface to a wrestler on the level of Randy Savage at his peak. There are wrestlers in this business who have one break out match that makes them a superstar (Sting at the first Clash). There are wrestlers who are anointed a top position from the start and never reach their perceived potential (Lex Luger). And there are the wrestlers who start low on the card and whose skills develop ahead of their recognition (Randy Savage, Bret Hart). It's the latter kind who prove to be the real MVPs year after year. Shawn Michaels fits that mold and 1995 was the year when his skills were given a top position to flourish; 1996 should continue his development of 1995.

Flair was the heel force in WCW around which the heavy babyface roster circled. His interviews were highlights of TV programs and WCW would have been a lot less of a promotion without him.

Razor Ramon, in retrospect, may have been a better gamble to run with as WWF Champion in 1995 than Diesel. Ramon's character was more defined, his match style while very formulaic, got pops from the crowd and was more consistent than Diesel. Ramon, more so than Diesel, could be carried by a better opponent to a show-stealing match. Even though he wasn't in the top slot, he gave the WWF the perception of having a deep roster during a rough year and saved a lot of shows when Diesel didn't come through in the main event.

Honorable mention to Sandman who was the MVP of ECW, a consistent icon for ECW fans to rally behind.

I stayed away from Ken Shamrock as a top pick because I believe UFC's success comes so much more from the concept than superstar draws. UFC had a great year without Gracie and could have without Shamrock, too.

2. JAPANESE MVP

Keiji Muto

1. Keiji Muto (24%)
 2. Mitsuharu Misawa (22%)
 3. Manami Toyota (18%)
 4. Jushin Liger (13%)
 5. Kenta Kobashi (12%)
- 6-10) Toshiaki Kawada, Chris Benoit, Great Sasuke, Masa Chono, Shinjiro Ohtani

PAST WINNERS:

- 1993: Kobashi, Stan Hansen, Liger
1992: Liger, Kobashi, Toyota
1991: Liger, Jumbo Tsuruta, Kobashi
1990: Liger, Keiji Muto, Tsuruta
1989: Akira Maeda, Genichiro Tenryu, Liger

AWARD COMMENTS

John Lister: Manami Toyota was part of virtually every major AJW bout and never once slipped below a four star threshold. Kenta Kobashi came into his own as the star of three superb hour-long bouts and thoroughly deserves the Triple Crown in '96. Muto's reunion with the belt sparked some of the best bouts of his career.

Barry Johnson: Keiji Muto's aerial abilities may not stand out as much in Japan as here in the U.S., but his unique combination of strength, ability, and unique character make Great Muta one of a kind. Jushin Liger gets second. If anyone has ever taken on as many opponents, taken as many teammates, and performed at his peak in each situation as Liger has done this year, please send me a tape of that person's matches. Chris Benoit gets third. Although he split his time between Japan, ECW, and WCW, Benoit made a large impact everywhere he went. It isn't his fault that WCW rarely included him in 1994 as one of the Four Horsemen. He is a wonderful heel, has an almost perfect body for wrestling, and aerial ability and agility that defies his appearance.

Aron DeMars: Whether Manami Toyota was against Aja Kong, Kyoko Inoue, Akira Hokuto, Dynamite Kansai, or 30 wrestlers in one night, she just never stopped working her ass off. The look she gave Hokuto at ringside before she won the belt was priceless. There isn't a more deserving champion in wrestling.

Ken Raftery: Manami Toyota gets my first place vote because she has an unbelievable

combination of workrate, charisma, and endurance. Her 1995 match against my second-place vote Kyoko Inoue, is a must-see for all fans.

James Zordani: Mitsuharu Misawa had stellar singles matches with Akira Taue, Kenta Kobashi, and Toshiaki Kawada. Misawa also teamed with Kobashi in many great tag bouts. Misawa is consistently great and the tag bout on Jan. 24 that was a 60 minute draw between Misawa & Kobashi and Kawada & Taue will forever be etched in my memory. Manami Toyota is the best female wrestler. Night in and night out, Toyota is terrific. She's a great high flier, takes incredible risks, and takes an amazing amount of punishment during her matches. Toshiaki Kawada is such a good worker that he can carry an average wrestler to a very good match. His recent bout with All Japan newcomer Gary Albright certainly proved that point.

John Magee: Manami Toyota is simply the best wrestler in the world, bar none. Muto has had a bit of a comeback this year, and Misawa put forth the usual great matches throughout the year.

Chris Clark: In tags as well as singles, Triple Crown champ Mitsuharu Misawa does it all. Keiji Muto had big wins on both continents in 1995, and growly grandpa Stan Hansen is still a force to be reckoned with.

Jason Hawkins: Jushin Liger, Kenta Kobashi, and Hiroshi Hase. Liger only wrestles half the year, but made up for lost time. Kobashi has another year of great work. Hase will be sorely missed during his retirement.

Matt Grady: Keiji Muto, Kenta Kobashi, and Manami Toyota. Muto wasn't the best worker in Japan or even New Japan, but as champ most of the year and as a key player in the UWFI feud, he gets number one. Kobashi is still the best worker in the world. Toyota had another great year.

Steve Yohe: All Japan Women had a good year and every card starred Manami Toyota. In 1995 she became their superstar. How she stays injury-free is one of the great mysteries of pro wrestling. Misawa plays a champion better than anyone in the sport and All Japan's style revolved around him in '95. Muto improved and probably drew more money than anyone as New Japan tried to turn him into this year's Inoki, but I believe much of his success has to do with the company he works for.

Bruce Mitchell: Manami Toyota. She consistently had four-and-a-half to five star matches all year long while headlining every major show for All Japan Women. Perhaps the

best, most athletic worker in the entire world.

2. Mitsuharu Misawa. This year's best performer in All Japan's long-running top feud. Misawa is the key figure and most popular in the All Japan promotion.

3. Keiji Muto. His work was sometimes inconsistent but he headlined for a company that had the biggest money year any promotion has ever seen. And when he was good, he was very good.

John Williams: Minami Toyota began 1995 slotted no higher than fifth on the pecking order in All Japan Women, behind the likes of reigning queen Aja Kong, perennial number one contender Yumiko Hotta, and the part-time legends Bull Nakano and Akira Hokuto. By the evening of Dec. 5, 1995, there was no doubt in any fan's mind that Toyota was the number one wrestler in the promotion. The fashion in which the promotion elevated Minami Toyota to the top spot should be studied by every promoter and booker in the world, and by anyone who considers themselves a student of the industry.

Chris Zavisa: Manami Toyota finally seems to be generally acknowledged as the best woman wrestler of all-time. For my money, you might well remove the qualifying gender designation off of that statement. Night after night she has matches which bottom out at four stars while almost every month sees her with a match-of-the-year contender. Her 60 minute draw against Kyoko Inoue and the big Sept. 2 victory in the Destiny match against Akira Hokuto are two of the best bouts you will ever see. Who else dominates a promotion like Toyota does and does it in a positive way?

Over the past five years, many experts have ranked both Toshiaki Kawada and Kenta Kobashi over Mitsuharu Misawa. In 1995, Misawa executed his role to perfection with ten years of experience all coming together in one nightly display of excellence after another. You could play his title defenses as textbook examples of what a true wrestler is supposed to do in the ring.

Cactus Jack had more impact in Japan than any other import. With the blessing of Terry Funk, he was transformed into a star and a major player with his victory at the Aug. 20 Kawasaki Death match tournament. Half of Cactus's appeal here is his great talent on the microphone. In Japan he cannot use that and depends solely on his workrate to get over. He helped take IWA from an also ran to a very solid group.

Wade Keller: What I said about Shawn Michaels earning his rise to the top applies to Manami Toyota, except her recognition came earlier and her matches have been more consistently spectacular than Michaels's.

It seems a spot has to be reserved for one of the big three—Misawa, Kobashi, or Kawada. This year Misawa gets the nod over the other two All Japan stand-outs. Third place goes to Muto for carrying the top spot in New Japan well.

3. MEXICAN MVP

Rey Misterio Jr.

1. Rey Misterio Jr. (30%)

2. Psicosis (25%)

3. Konnan (22%)

4. Perro Aguayo (8%)

5. El Hijo del Santo (3%)

6-10) La Parka, Juventud Guerrera,
Negro Casas, Cien Caras, Miguel Perez

PAST WINNERS:

1994: Art Barr, Konnan, Aguayo Jr.

1993: Konnan, Misterio Jr., Cien Caras

1992: Blue Panther, Konnan, Canadian
Vampire

AWARD COMMENTS

Tom Quinn: Rey Misterio Jr. and Psicosis get the top two spots respectively for establishing themselves in North America on their ability alone, and still maintaining their status in AAA as two of the best workers in Mexico. Third goes to Konnan for maintaining his popularity in Mexico while spending a lot of time in the U.S.

Bruno Arteaga: El Hijo del Santo has come a long way despite following in his father's footsteps. Rey Misterio Jr. is electrifying.

Ted Bauer: Psicosis is the most gifted flyer to come along in quite a while, so he gets no. 1. Misteiro is just underneath him at no. 2 as another enthralling wrestler. After so many years of looking for the "next Hulk Hogan," he has been found: Konnan. In Mexico, I give him no. 3. Unfortunately he has acquired Hogan's work ethic, too.

Aron DeMars: You can take the highspots of Rey Jr. and his pals, the legendary status of Perro Aguayo, the charismatic star power of Konnan, the mat wrestling of Blue Panther, the crowd-working ability of Negro Casas, the new ECW-influenced brawling in AAA, and the only man who competes on all levels is Santo Jr. This guy is my hero. He was influential because his jump turned the promotional war in favor of EMLL and inspired others to follow suit, poor economy notwithstanding.

John Magee: Rey Misterio Jr.'s creativity in developing moves puts him far ahead of everyone else. Konnan tends to be the "clutch hitter," putting forth his best efforts in important matches. La Parka gets third for putting in solid efforts time and again, which turned into a bigger push late in 1995.

John Lister: Konnan continued to draw the

crowd regardless of match quality. Santo's break from AAA demonstrated his importance to the business. Misterio Jr. made himself a permanent fixture on tape trader's lists with some indescribable moves.

Jason Hawkins: Konnan is to Mexico what Hogan once was to U.S. wrestling fans. Rey Misterio Jr. is a joy to watch. Psicosis is Mexico's closest star to Jushin Liger.

James Zordani: Rey Misterio Jr. is the most innovative high-flyer in recent years. He is often beyond description. It's great that more American fans got to see him in 1995. Juventud Guerrera like Rey Jr. is a very young man who is already a tremendous wrestler. He's been better ever since Fuerza Guerrero left AAA. Psicosis takes incredible bumps and plays his heel role well.

Brian Yursha: Rey Misterio Jr. is very entertaining to watch. Most of the things he does in the ring are incredible. Hopefully one day he will get a chance to wrestle in the WWF and get a strong push. He is one of the best aerial wrestlers in the world. Psicosis is my second choice because he is like Misterio Jr. in that he is incredible to watch. Konnan is my third pick. Hopefully WCW will use him right because he has a lot of potential.

Chris Clark: Rey Misterio Jr. may be small but he is definitely a huge sensation on or above the Mexican mat. Konnan and Perro Aguayo mop up the other two spots because they still rule the rings south of the border.

John Molinaro: Rey Misterio Jr. was easily the best worker in Mexico with Psicosis a close second. Miguel Perez if given the opportunity and proper exposure has the capability of being the next Art Barr. He is the best heel in Mexico.

Steve James: Rey Misterio Jr. easily had the best year of anybody wrestling in AAA. His matches with Psicosis and Juventud Guerrera were true classics. Misterio is already great and at his young age he can only get better. Second goes to El Hijo del Santo. Whether he was wrestling in AAA or in EMLL, Santo had a very nice year. His arrival in EMLL and feud with Negro Casas were a big boost for EMLL. Third goes to Psicosis. His matches with Rey Jr. were a highlight film of non-stop action. The bouts he's had in the United States should help him gain further international status. This past year appeared to be a tough one for Mexico wrestling, especially AAA. Art Barr's death, the departure of many stars, and decreased television airtime truly weakened AAA.

Chris Zavisa: Rey Misterio Jr. is one of the most watchable wrestlers in the world. He takes me back to the days of watching Saturo Sayama as Tiger Mask where you constantly had the remote

in your hand knowing you would be stopping and rewinding many times in each match. There is no person in the world who can do the things he does in the ring, over the ring, and out of the ring. I strongly hope his body takes him beyond a year or two.

Psicosis captured my attention the first time I saw him with that Walmart version of a Liger outfit. Funny that in the last few years he has blown right past Liger and is now a great talent in his own right. Misterio Jr. would have to give up a good half of his more flashy moves if he did not have Psicosis there on the receiving end. He is the total package for Lucha style in that he has ability, charisma, and a great character gimmick.

La Parka may look like a maniacal specter from a Tim Burton movie, but he is one of the more technically solid workers in all the land. He has good size, great ability, and always puts out 100 percent.

John Williams: Konnan El Barbaro and Pedro "El Perro" Aguayo are interchangeable for first place. Aguayo is the better draw, but Konnan gets the nod for being a key force in AAA's front office during a roller coaster year for the promotion. An easy third is El Hijo del Santo who is probably the least talked about great worker in the world and was largely responsible for popping EMLL's best series of gates in years.

Bruce Mitchell: First is Perro Aguayo, the hard-working, traditional babyface who remains the backbone of AAA's appeal. Aguayo was in the center of all of his promotion's big shows. Konnan, the number one babyface along with Aguayo are also at the center of AAA's biggest feuds. Konnan was a key figure behind the scenes as well as encouraging Antonio Pena to adapt aspects of new styles to their promotion. Third pick is El Hijo del Santo, who is a complete performer whose jump to the EMLL promotion caused a concurrent jump in their attendance figures. Rey Misterio Jr. is not at the very top of the card for AAA, but his work is stretching the boundaries of the pro wrestling form. His work in AAA, following the ground-breaking Eddie Guerrero, hopefully opened a lot of eyes.

Wade Keller: Rey Misterio Jr. was the most spectacular wrestler, but Konnan, El Hijo del Santo, and Perro Aguayo were the three most valuable wrestlers to their respective promotions. Misterio gets honorable mention for out-working my top three picks. Aguayo fits into AAA the same way Ric Flair might fit into WCW in a few years if he's still wrestling—an elder-statesman of legendary status who is revered by the long time fans, even though his work is based entirely on ring psychology. Santo is what Randy Savage should be, a steady veteran who has drawing power and has honed in on his in-ring strengths that make him still a top flight worker. And Konnan is as close as Mexico comes to having its own Hulk Hogan who knows how to get the most out of the least in the ring, with the ability unlike Hogan to turn it up a notch when it really matters in terms of putting on a high-quality match.

4. MATCH OF THE YEAR

Michaels vs. Ramon

1. Shawn Michaels vs. Razor Ramon ladder match, S-Slam 8/27 (33%)

2. Jarrett vs. Michaels, IYH2 7/23 (17%)

3. Guerrero vs. Malenko, ECW farewell 8/26 (10%)

4. Bret Hart vs. British Bulldog, 12/17 IYH (9%)

5. Pitbulls vs. Raven & Richards, ECW 9/16 (8%)

6-10 Guerrero vs. Malenko 4/15 ECW, Michaels vs. Diesel Wrestlemania 4/2, Psicosis vs. Misterio 9/16 ECW, Eddie Guerrero vs. Shinjiro Otani Starrcade 12/26, Michaels & Ahmed Johnson & Bulldog & Sid vs. Ramon & Yokozuna & Douglas & Owen Hart 11/19 Survivor Series Wildcard match

PAST WINNERS:

1994: Michaels vs. Ramon, Barr & Guerrero vs. Santo & Octagon, Owen vs. Bret

1993: Vader vs. Flair, Vader vs. Cactus, Vader vs. Sting

1992: Pillman vs. Liger, Royal Rumble, WarGames, Vader vs. Sting

1991: Sting & Lex Luger vs. Rick & Scott Steiner, Bret Hart vs. "Mr. Perfect" Curt Hennig, Rick Steamboat & Dustin Rhodes vs. Larry Zbyszko & Arn Anderson

1990: Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane vs. Tracy Smothers & Steve Armstrong, Hulk Hogan vs. Ultimate Warrior, Nasty Boys vs. Rick & Scott Steiner

1989: Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat (2/20), Flair vs. Steamboat (4/2), Flair vs. Steamboat (5/7)

1988: Ric Flair vs. Sting, Bobby Fulton & Tommy Rogers vs. Bobby Eaton & Stan Lane, Ric Flair vs. Lex Luger

John Lister: The Michaels-Ramon match added superior psychology to their Wrestlemania X classic and was all the more impressive considering it was Michaels's only such bout in the year. Scorpio vs. Benoit (Jan., Florida) will have been missed by many but remains a hidden gem in the wealth of brilliance on ECW TV. Public Enemy vs. Pit Bulls (4/15) was tough style brawling at its most brutal and crazy.

John Magee: Guerrero vs. Malenko was an easy vote, having seen it in person. The atmosphere in the building was incredible and the tribute paid to those two was even more so. The TV presentation didn't do it justice. The Pit Bulls vs. Raven & Richards saw all four men really bust their asses and make it a must-see-to-be-believed match. Misterio vs. Psicosis allowed, for the first time on an English channel, a regularly broadcast audience, as opposed to pay-per-view, a chance to see what lucha libre at its best is all about.

Peter Parrotta: Shawn Michaels vs. Razor Ramon was the best. If there were more wrestlers of Shawn's ability they would have the best matches in history. The Malenko-Guerrero match in Middletown, N.Y. (7/28) was a four and a half star classic. The brawl that night between the Public Enemy and The Gangstas had chairs, tables, meat tenderizers, baseball bats, irons, Monopoly game boards, sticks, belts, rain, you name it, they used it. Everyone was standing. I was surprised by how hardcore my Middletown, N.Y. wrestling fan counterparts are. The chants, the atmosphere, everything about that night was great. Even the rain.

Barry Johnson: I wasn't sure if they could top the first one, but Michaels and Ramon did it. They came up with moves I would have never thought of and I never thought they would try anything like a splash from the top of the ladder. The charisma of both wrestlers really showed through during this match and earned them respect as two of the hardest workers in the WWF. Flair vs. Luger vs. Sting at Starrcade was a surprise. I watched it with great skepticism, expecting average slow action, followed by a cheap finish, but what I got was a pleasant surprise. Three solid match-ups with each man showing his strengths and weaknesses against the other two. The workrate was good, and the finish wasn't terribly creative, but it was intriguing. Bret Hart vs. Davey Boy Smith, with good workrate, creative choreography, and a new twist on some old moves, they put on a show almost as good as their SummerSlam '92 match. Bret's bleeding made everyone stand up and take notice. The clean pinfall was a refreshing change from the average WWF Title defense.

Jeffrey Cohen: Like Ric Flair before him,

Shawn Michaels is starting to prove that he can have great matches with people who couldn't muster two stars on their own, such as Razor Ramon and Diesel. Let's see who he gets saddled with if he gets the WWF Title. Maybe Yokozuna and the Undertaker.

Brian Diericks: The Ramon-Michaels ladder match is my pick because it was the only five star match in the running. Even though it didn't have as many breath-taking moves with the ladder as the first match, it was just as good. The match told a story, progressed logically, and had some great highspots making this a deserving candidate for match of the year.

Ted Bauer: Michaels and Ramon put together yet another classic at SummerSlam with more highspots than three WCW pay-per-views combined. They get no. 1 for the second year in a row. The Pit Bulls vs. Raven & Richards match from Sept. 16 illustrated the strengths of the strongest promotion out there, ECW, and thus gets no. 2. Pillman vs. Badd from Fall Brawl epitomizes why Pillman should be upset with his position within WCW. The best match of the year in WCW lands it no. 3.

Bruno Artega: The Guerrero-Malenko sendoff match on Aug. 26 was awesome and emotional. They outdid themselves. The Pit Bulls vs. Steve Richards & Raven on Sept. 16 was edge of seat action. And Rey Misterio Jr. vs. Psicosis on Oct. 17 was Oh mi Dios, as Joey Styles would say.

Jason Amari: It seems anytime Michaels and Ramon get in the ring together, a four or five star match takes place. Hopefully the two will have their ladder match tie-breaker in the near future.

Brian Keenan: The ladder match at SummerSlam was the best in a mediocre year of matches. All the promotions have become so angle- and storyline-oriented, there's hardly any actual wrestling that matters anymore.

Tom Quinn: First place goes to ECW's original "Three Way Dance" between The Public Enemy, Steiner & Taz, and Benoit & Malenko. The match would have been better had Sabu been there, but Steiner did a respectable job in his place. The match had hot action by six of the best workers in North America and told a great story. Second goes to Sabu & Taz vs. Benoit & Malenko. This five star encounter was one of the best all-around matches anywhere on the globe. Third goes to the original Eddy Guerrero vs. Dean Malenko classic in ECW. This was like a wrestling instruction video with every move performed perfectly, and allowed these two to show why they're two of the best workers in the world.

Chris Conroy: The SummerSlam ladder match, Hart vs. Bulldog, and L.T. vs. Bigelow were all excellently booked and had great storylines and performances. They each had me on the edge of my seat without the use of tables, chairs, frying pans, or homosexual or racial references.

Annette Boyer: A daily double for Shawn Michaels. His sequel to the ladder match with

Razor Ramon and his IC Title win at IYH2. Bret Hart vs. Bulldog gets third for the subtle hints of hardcore.

James Janota: Bret Hart and Davey Boy Smith beat the hell out of each other for almost a half hour and it was a thrill a second. It also marked the triumphant return of blood to the WWF. The ladder match at SummerSlam exceeded my expectations, but fell short of the first match because a prop was used. Shawn Michaels and Jeff Jarrett used nothing but their excellent skills in mat and aerial techniques to stop the show at IYH2.

Ken Raftery: I saw the July 23 Michaels vs. Jarrett match in person and I thought it was fantastic. Give Jarrett credit for working this hard minutes before he quit the promotion. Had he pulled an ego-trip and no-showed the card, he would have prevented a great match from taking place.

Tony Martin: The ladder match at SummerSlam made me excited again. I was starting to get bored with the industry. They should have one more in '96 as a two out of three finale.

R. McMahon: The emotion in the ECW Arena for the Malenko vs. Guerrero finale was unbelievable. It brought tears to my eyes. Shawn Michaels showed against Jeff Jarrett why he's the best. Rey Misterio Jr. vs. Psicosis just dazzled me and made me feel proud to be a wrestling fan.

Matt Grady: First goes to the Misterio Jr. vs. Psicosis match in ECW on Oct. 7. It was a great match with incredible highspots and they even added some brawling. Just an incredible match. Second place was Michaels vs. Ramon from SummerSlam. This match was better than their first and was just edged out by the Misterio vs. Psicosis match. Michaels's moonsault off the ladder was one of the best moves of the year. The Pit Bulls vs. Raven & Steve Richards on Sept. 16, 1995 was a great brawl and the post-match angles were done to perfection.

Melanie S. Snyder: I was skeptical about trying to repeat Wrestlemania X's ladder match, but I was on-hand to witness the rematch at SummerSlam and it was the most impressive about I have ever seen live. And it held up on video, too.

Eric McHugh: The Pit Bulls vs. Raven & Steve Richards double dog collar match was the most episodic and draining bout I've ever seen. Numerous storylines that went on over a period of up to nine months came to a head in this bout. The match itself was awesome, too. Michaels vs. Ramon gets second. Eddie and Dean's ECW finale was their greatest. I was in tears at the end.

Joshua Christie: Nobody ever expected Michaels and Ramon to equal or surpass their Wrestlemania classic, but they ended up succeeding quite admirably. Top workrate, fresh spots, and powerful heat made the ladder match the clearcut 1995 match of the year. Michaels vs.

Jarrett was simply wrestling at its best. It further demonstrated why Michaels is the American MVP of the year while also establishing Jarrett as a main event caliber wrestler. The wildcard Survivor Series match took an old concept and rejuvenated it with well thought out booking that enabled it to stand out against the other few four star matches of 1995.

Marshall Goldberg: The Michaels-Ramon ladder rematch was just a notch below its 1994 counterpart and therefore was a clear 1995 winner. It should be an annual event.

Russell Brown: Each time The Public Enemy faced The Gangstas it was an exhibition of pure violence and hot moves. Their cage match featured the greatest highspot of all time when Flyboy Rocco Rock moonsaulted from the top of the cage onto New Jack through two tables. That one move alone made it match of the year. I choose the double dog collar match with The Pit Bulls vs. Raven & Richards as second. With the gimmick of dog collars, two out of three falls stipulation, numerous highspots, and the run in of eight others, and then still a title changed hands with a clean finish along with the long-awaited chokeslam of Bill Alfonso. This was hardcore chaos at its best.

James Zordani: First goes to the Ramon vs. Michaels ladder match. The Guerrero-Malenko best of three falls send off match that ended in a draw was one of their better bouts, but what made the bout a match of the year candidate was what happened after the bout. The standing ovations given to Guerrero and Malenko actually brought tears to my eyes. I can't recall being that emotional over a match in a long time. Malenko even broke character and spoke to the ECW fans. It's something that could only happen at the ECW Arena.

Jason Hawkins: Ramon vs. Michaels ladder match at SummerSlam proved lightning does strike twice. Sting vs. Flair at World War 3 was one of their better matches. L.T. vs. Bigelow far surpassed everyone's expectations.

Bruce Mitchell: 1. Rey Misterio Jr. vs. Psicosis, two out of three falls at ECW Arena. The best match in the history of the ECW Arena, this match mixed the AAA high-flying style with the ECW brawling style and continued their innovative series of matches in a new way.

2. Shawn Michaels vs. Razor Ramon ladder match. Not quite as good as the all-time classic from 1994's Wrestlemania, but this was still an excellent, exciting match.

3. Eddie Guerrero vs. Dean Malenko, Aug. 27, ECW Arena. From the wrestlers to the commentary to the setting to the fans, a classy production in a year that particularly lacked class.

John Williams: What do you get when you take North America's top two babyface draws, the world's top drawing heel, the Mexican equivalent of the Ultimate Warrior, two of the ten best workers in the world, the best flyer of his

generation, lucha libre's version of an acrobatic gangster hoodie, the best rookie to debut in North America in the 1990s, Japan's funniest gimmick wrestler and an independent wrestler so talented that you quickly forget he's wearing a pumpkin-head mask, put them all in a pointed "Star of David" cage, throw in standard wrestling paraphernalia such as table, ladders, and chairs, mix in buckets of juice and near self-inflicted scalping, and finally add every crazy highspot conceived and then go beyond to invent a few new ones simply for the bell of it? You get the Dec. 9, 1995 match between Pedro "El Perro" Aguayo & Konnan vs. Cien Caras & Cibernetico and a half-dozen of their close friends, the best match yet of the psychotic style of wrestling spawned by ECW. It will go down as one of the holy grail matches of the 1990s for tape collectors, simply for the fact that no one remembered to bring a video camera to shoot it. What will be forgotten over time was that it wasn't even the best match on the card. On the undercard, Psicosis & Juventud Guerrera & Picudo vs. Rey Misterio Jr. & Perro Aguayo Jr. & Frisbee displayed state of the art AAA style lucha libre that was a joy to watch.

Chris Zavisa: First goes to Raven & Steve Richards vs. The Pit Bulls (Sept. 16), second to Shawn Michaels vs. Razor Ramon at SummerSlam and third to AAA Star Cage Street Fight in Los Angeles (Dec. 9).

Although none of the above would have made my top ten worldwide, these were the best three in U.S. and Canada. Raven & Richards vs. The Pit Bulls had enough involved that it took a good half page just to describe the twists and turns and all the cast of characters who eventually popped up. It was the best booked match of the year and had the single most longed for moment at 911 finally chokeslammed the hated Bill Alfonso. Great action, tremendous moves, what more could you ask for.

Michaels and Ramon tried to have lightning strike twice in the same place and darn near succeeded. Their ladder match was just a notch under the first one. It may have had a better storyline but was lacking in those suicidal moves the first one had. Having said that it was one tremendous effort and the best thing any American major promotion did all year.

Third goes to the Dec. AAA L.A. street fight that involved about ten people doing dives, dropkicks, moonsaults, and more off the top of the cage, sometimes to the arena floor.

Wade Keller: Despite the conventional wisdom that says they fell short of their first ladder match, watching both matches back to back, the second Michaels-Ramon ladder match was better than the first. It was definitely a sequel in that there were spots from the first match redone with a deliberate twist in the second match. Second place goes to the Guerrero vs. Malenko finale. Not their best match technically, but the meaning and emotion puts this a notch above the rest. Third goes to Michaels vs. Jarrett.

5. HEEL OF THE YEAR

Ric Flair

1. Ric Flair (15%)
2. Raven (12%)
3. Cactus Jack (10%)
4. Sandman (8%)
5. Jeff Jarrett (5%)

6-10) Vader, Bill Alfonso, Owen Hart, Stevie Richards, Brian Pillman

PAST WINNERS:

1994: Bob Backlund, Shawn Michaels, Shane Douglas

1993: Vader, Jerry Lawler, Michaels

1992: Rick Rude, Ric Flair, Van Vader

1991: Jake Roberts, The Undertaker, Flair.

1990: Flair, Stan Hansen, Curt Hennig.

1989: Terry Funk, Lex Luger, Randy Savage.

1988: Ted DiBiase, Barry Windham, Eddie Gilbert.

AWARD COMMENTS

Annette Boyer: It's hard to believe Scott Levy used to be Johnny Polo. His Raven persona is a dead-on treasure played to perfection. Sid is a horrible wrestler, but his interviews and ring present make him the WWF's top heel in 1995.

Tony Martin: Brian Pillman was hilarious as a crazy, out of control maniac. He would be better suited for the WWF. No matter what people think of Sid's ability, he is still the most intimidating.

Tom Mansour: Until Dec. 27, Ric Flair was the tailspin winner. But in a bad year for heels, he pulls out the award at the end of the year.

Tom Quinn: Bill Alfonso for being the most hated man in the history of ECW. This own man's mother would chant for a 911 chokeslam on him. Al Snow gets second for his excellent mic work in SMW as well as his great in-ring work. Third goes to Jerry Lawler for his continued mic work in the WWF, as well as carrying on his hot feud with Bret Hart.

Brian Keenan: Wrestling's best heels all come from ECW—Sandman, Raven, and Bill Alfonso. I enjoyed, though, the many intriguing face vs. face and heel vs. heel match-ups the two major promotions put on during the year.

Jason Amari: It seems that solid heels became a thing of the past in most promotions. Flair remained one of the top heels in the business

during 1995. His turn on Sting was well-executed and seeing him as world champion once again in a promotion run by Hogan is a great way to end the year.

Ted Bauer: When the "In Your House" concept debuted, angles got hot-shotted more often than ever. Instead of a gradual, 18-month break-up between Sid and Michaels, it happened the night after Wrestlemania. So, instead of Michaels stealing the show as a heel, he stole it as a babyface. Thus Raven, the best heel in ECW, gets this award.

Brian Diericks: You know it was a bad year for heels when the winner is a referee (Alfonso). There wasn't one heel this year that made me mad and want to see him "get beat up" by the babyface. This may be one reason buyrates fell in '95.

Jeffrey Cohen: A bad year for heels. The best, Vader, went unemployed after his WCW blowup. ECW's Raven drew heat for his matches with Tommy Dreamer, an angle Paul Heyman is successfully dragging into 1996. Cactus Jack's turn allowed him to do the interviews of his lifetime. Also, Alfonso took the oft-used evil ref gimmick to perfection.

Phil Breen: Raven isn't a typical heel. First of all, he isn't a chickensh-- heel (which is refreshing). He works really hard and has helped keep the Dreamer-Raven feud exciting. There is a sense of believability to the character (unlike Giant, Zodiac, Goldust, etc.). He's a great interview and you just can't help but be intrigued by him. Raven and Steve Richards are the most entertaining pair in wrestling. Their chemistry is great.

John Magee: Raven gets the nod as his efforts in leading most of the ECW heel contingent (if there even is such a thing) made for great stuff all year. Cactus is just behind, and not by much. Hogan would have been up there too, as he gets heat for whatever he does, particularly in pro-Flair cities.

John Lister: Bill Alfonso created old-style mark-based heat in the land of the hardcores. Cactus disguised a well earned break as the ultimate ironic heel character, a man who follows the rules. Al Snow took over Chris Candido's mantle as the cocky so-and-so with the towering partner.

Eric McHugh: Steve Richards is the greatest heel I've seen in years. He's so despised that even though he can work, the ECW fans still hate him. Al Snow broke out in SMW as wrestling's best smartass. Bill Alfonso is third. People want him dead. Honorable mention to Brian Pillman, wrestling's next great psychotic. I wanted to vote for Sandman, but he's ECW's most popular

wrestler.

John Molinaro: No man in this sport had more heel heat than heel referee Bill Alfonso. I'm amazed he made it out of the ECW Arena each night in one piece as I was certain the hardcores of Philadelphia would take a poke at him.

Keith Legaz: Recently the major promotions haven't featured any heels who could draw incredible heat. The best heel of the year is British Bulldog. If it weren't for his several months absence from the WWF, Jeff Jarrett would have received my vote.

Chris Clark: Jeff Jarrett was the only heel in 1995 who could hold the attention of fans. Vader gets second for managing to piss absolutely everyone off last year.

Gary Miller: The Giant gets heel of the year because he came in during the year and basically squashed Hogan. His gimmick might stink, but he he rules.

Bruce Mitchell: Sandman. A smokin', drinkin', hardass who drunk or drunker pushed his abused body to its limits. Totally slimy. Bill Alfonso is second. I can't believe that ECW fans bought into his "Party Pooper" character so completely, but they truly hated everything he supposedly stood for. Third goes to Steve McMichael. WCW meant him to be a heel, right?

Chris Zavisa: Neither of the U.S. majors had a heel worth his weight in salt. ECW had three who were worth their weight in gold. Bill Alfonso created a character which became the most hated person in wrestling. The ECW fans sometimes cheer those they are supposed to hate and boo those they are supposed to love. Who can tell? But Alfonso, with that cocky manner, those ugly teeth, more secret rules than are known to the CIA, had every person in ECW Arena hating him.

Sandman does everything wrong, is the very opposite of an athlete and role model, and has a gimmick that I find personally disgusting. When he opposes Cactus Jack or Mikey Whipwreck, I find myself cheering. He does his job well.

Cactus started the year as one truly great babyface, but was transformed into the anti-hardcore god. He did so with grace, style, and a sense of humor. I loved all those spots during the Pulp Fiction montages making fun of what it means to be hardcore and the hardcore fans in Philly. He was most obviously pulling their chain and every single one of them fell for it and fell for it hard.

John Williams: Vader by default as the only heel who could draw. Easily the worst year for heels in the modern history of U.S. wrestling.

Wade Keller: Bill Alfonso and Raven were two role model heels in the industry as they were not the usual monster heels or crybaby heels. Both were so into their characters that it was hard to imagine them outside the ring as normal people, which can't be said for many heels. Third place goes to Vader for actually intimidating fans rather than being laughed at.

6. BABYFACE OF THE YEAR

Shawn Michaels

1. Shawn Michaels (40%)
2. Bret Hart (23%)
3. Sting (19%)
4. Razor Ramon (7%)
5. Diesel (5%)

6-10) Tommy Dreamer, Undertaker, Public Enemy, Mikey Whipwreck, Eddie Guerrero.

PAST WINNERS:

- 1994: Bret Hart, Sting, Hogan
1993: Bret Hart, Sting, Ric Flair
1992: Sting, Bret Hart, Randy Savage
1991: Hulk Hogan, Sting, Savage.
1990: Hulk Hogan, Sting, Lex Luger.
1989: Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, Sting.
1988: Sting, Hulk Hogan, Savage.

AWARD COMMENTS

John Lister: Shawn Michaels somehow gained mass appeal without losing credibility among hardcore fans and regularly receives the pop of the night. Undertaker was beloved simply by facing such abysmal opposition. Public Enemy's antics earn them cheers even as they negotiated to "sell out."

Tim Dills: Bret Hart is the top babyface in the U.S. mainly because he's been around for so long. Buddy Landel's SMW face turn was great. Although he wasn't able to have a long run due to SMW's untimely demise, he was the ideal choice for that spot there. Ramon comes in third.

Adam Hopkins: Shawn Michaels was a babyface before they even turned him. For the most part, his character hasn't changed and the crowd pops huge for his every move. Bret Hart stayed strong this year despite being pushed down the cards for the most part of 1995. His popularity stayed so strong, that by November he had the title back.

John Magee: Michaels and Savage are neck-and-neck here; both get great reactions from their fans no matter what they do and whom they do it to. Anyone who wrestles Hogan ends up as the natural babyface, even if it's Luger or someone from the Dungeon of Doom.

Barry Johnson: Shawn Michaels has the one thing only a few men in the history of wrestling have had: natural charisma. He gets people's attention and keeps them on the edges of their seats every minute he's in sight. He's even a

good commentator. He could become more popular than Hogan was, but only if they will focus on his strengths and give him opponents who can keep up with his pace and style.

Jeffrey Cohen: Shawn Michaels is the runaway choice. Even just walking to the ring to hand over the title to Dean Douglas, he controlled the crowd. Despite the sabotaging efforts, Ric Flair is still the Man in WCW. And Sandman proved that there is such a thing as an independent superstar.

Aron DeMars: Perro Aguayo, Santo, and Konnan are absolutely adored by their fans. Hogan could certainly learn a thing or two from them.

Ted Bauer: Shawn Michaels is always entertaining, charismatic, and superb in the ring. His mic work is cocky and excellent. He lands the top spot this year. Tommy Dreamer represents the "hardcore" element of ECW and the fans love him. He lands no. 2. Bret Hart is a tremendous babyface and his mic work is very good. He gets no. 3, although in a promotion without Shawn Michaels, he would be no. 1.

Phil Breen: Shawn Michaels has charisma to burn. He turns on an arena like no one else. He's the logical choice. Tommy Dreamer works just as hard as Michaels in a place that's not "babyface" friendly. He's the ultimate martyr. No matter how hard he tries, he can't get the upperhand in the feud with Raven. He's had broken fingers, Cactus Jack turned on him, he's been burned, and for God's sake, he's been crucified. He's everything a babyface should be, without the "packed and polished" look and attitude of Shawn Michaels.

R.D. Murray: Shawn Michaels is just so 1996 and so cool and talented that he is an easy choice.

Jason Amari: No one could eliven a crowd as Michaels did all year. It's just a matter of time before he's WWF Champion.

James Zordani: Mikey Whipwreck played his role very well in ECW. Bret Hart is the best babyface in the WWF. Buddy Landel's interviews and skits in SMW were outstanding.

Tom Quinn: Diesel gets first for being the WWF's most over wrestler while continually improving. Second goes to Shawn Michaels for his total babyface appeal and charisma. Third goes to Sandman for being the leader of the Extreme Revolution.

Joshua Christie: Shawn Michaels is about the only babyface all year who could take a lifeless crowd and bring them up to a standing ovation with the mere sight of his presence or sound of his voice. That in itself is enough to deem him the definitive babyface of the year. Despite being

shoved from his main event position atop pay-per-views this year, Bret Hart continued to work hard to get his otherwise uninspired opponents over and, in the process, carry them to some memorable matches. The Undertaker gets my third pick because he always receives the loudest pops of the night no matter who he is wrestling.

Matt Grady: Shawn Michaels may have been the most over face in the big two. He is a great worker and it should be interesting to see if he can lead the WWF into the second half of the '90s. Hart was the second most over wrestler in the WWF this year. Third goes to TPE. Just take a look at their ring entrances in ECW.

Eric McHugh: Shawn Michaels is so over it's frightening. Tommy Dreamer truly appreciates the sport and its fans. Bret Hart and Johnny B. Badd tie for third.

John Williams: Last I looked, primary requirement in the job description for a top babyface is that he draw. All babyfaces that drew in the U.S. in 1995, please say aye. That's the response I was expecting.

Chris Zavisa: Undoubtedly a weak category with the domination of Hogan, Savage, and Diesel—none of whom are any good. First goes to Shawn Michaels for overall excellence in his matches and a healthy dose of charisma thrown in for good measure. The prospect of him as champ could make it a most interesting year for the WWF.

Second goes to Whipwreck who just may be the most underdog of all time underdogs. He has the character down pat and has turned into a pretty good worker in the ring. Those bouts against Sandman had me cringing with some of those stiff shots.

Third is Eddie Guerrero. His outstanding ability and natural likability screams "push me, push me," but WCW brass seem too stupid or blind to see what they have right under their very noses. Eddie could be the next Rick Steamboat if they would just make a few bold moves.

Bruce Mitchell: Shawn Michaels. A guy so cool the guys didn't mind what the little girls understood. Michaels is this year's Ric Flair, a performer who is excellent in all aspects of the art. Bret Hart gets second. A babyface who kept his core of fans for good reason. Perro Aguayo gets third. The respected veteran who fans love for his hard work, and for his long tenure on top. This is how Ric Flair should be portrayed, instead of just how he is perceived by most WCW fans.

Wade Keller: Shawn Michaels deserves the number one pick. The Public Enemy were in tune with their fans as much as anybody. Not exactly role models, but there was a bond that most babyfaces would never be able to create. Mikey Whipwreck is the ultimate humble, underdog babyface and was handled a lot better than Horowitz's similar copycat push.

7. FEUD OF THE YEAR

Raven vs. Dreamer

1. Raven vs. Dreamer
2. Guerrero vs. Malenko
3. TPE vs. Gangstas
4. Rey Misterio Jr. vs. Psicosis
5. Cactus vs. Dreamer
- 6-10) Diesel vs. Michaels, Ramon vs. Kid, SMW vs. USWA, Flair vs. Savage, Bret vs. Diesel

PAST WINNERS:

- 1994: Bret vs. Owen, Flair vs. Hogan, Michaels vs. Ramon
1993: Hart vs. Lawler, Jack vs. Vader, Sting vs. Vader
1992: Flair vs. Savage, Moondogs vs. Lawler & Jarrett, Vader vs. Sting
1991: Eddie Gilbert vs. Cactus Jack, Ric Flair vs. Hulk Hogan, Sting vs. Cactus Jack.
1990: Nasty Boys vs. The Steiners, Ric Flair vs. Sting, Jerry Lawler vs. Eddie Gilbert.
1989: Ric Flair vs. Terry Funk, Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat, Hulk Hogan vs. Randy Savage.
1988: Randy Savage vs. Ted DiBiase, The Fantastics vs. The Midnight Express, Jake Roberts vs. Rick Rude.

AWARD COMMENTS

Tom Quinn: Diesel vs. Shawn Michaels was the WWF's best feud of the year by far. The turn of Michaels added to the drama. Second goes to Raven vs. Dreamer for solidifying Dreamer's spot as a true hardcore wrestler, and killing the memory of "Scotty Flamingo." Third goes to Sandman vs. Whipwreck for bringing Mikey up a level, and maintaining heat.

David Goldberg: In 1995 there wasn't a more competitive, exciting feud than Malenko vs. Guerrero. This great feud brought actual wrestling to ECW, instead of having to deal with their usual routine of no-talent brawling and blading. Malenko and Guerrero rivalled some of the all-time great pure wrestling feuds, like Flair vs. Steamboat. Unfortunately, we may never see this brilliant feud continue because Malenko and Guerrero are in WCW. Guerrero and Malenko, however, are the only ones who deserve credit

for their great matches in ECW, and not anybody else from ECW, especially not Paul Heyman.

Phil Breen: Dreamer vs. Raven with no competition. The feud has been going on since January 1995 and has yet to get stale. With the Cactus turn, Luna, Beulah, Terry Funk, the Pit Bulls, etc... all being thrown into the mix, it kept it fresh. The storyline has been great. From Tommy getting his fingers broken to being crucified to pinning Raven in the tag match, it's been a classic. Both Tommy and Raven have worked incredibly hard and have produced the best feud of not only 1995, but the '90s. Dean and Eddy had the best series of matches of the year. The feud was simple—to find out who was the better man.

Aron DeMars: Sometimes I have a lot more fun watching what goes on behind the scenes than what is in the ring. No feuds in the ring had any real emotion this year.

Matt Grady: Tommy Dreamer vs. Raven easily takes this award. The angles, matches, and music videos were perfect. The cast of characters who were involved in the feud were great, too. Malenko vs. Guerrero was a good feud as well. Sandman vs. Whipwreck was another great feud in ECW and it places third. Mikey winning was a huge upset.

John Magee: Malenko vs. Guerrero wins, but not for the typical "feud" reasons. It got the most reaction from fans, even though there was no real "heat." Raven vs. Dreamer, on the other hand, did get heat. SMW vs. USWA was also up there. The fans were into it and it's a shame it ended too soon.

John Lister: Raven vs. Dreamer was the freshest feud in years. Great character development, a continuing storyline which was clearly fictional yet thoroughly plausible, and sheer endurance set the standard for feuds free from simple prejudicial characters. Guerrero-Malenko was simply an ongoing tale of wrestling excellence. Body Donnas vs. Barry Horowitz deserves mention. Despite the jobber nature of Candido, it was SMW style entertainment at its best.

Brian Yursha: The Malenko-Guerrero feud was the best of the year. They had some classic matches together. They both have a lot of talent. Shawn Michaels vs. Diesel is my second choice. Their Wrestlemania match was great. It was Diesel's best match of his career thus far. I also saw them face each other in a tag match at Madison Square Garden (Michaels & Jarrett vs. Diesel & Ramon on Mar. 20) and it was a great four-star match. My third pick is the Barry Horowitz vs. Skip feud. Their match at SummerSlam was very good and I was surprised that Barry won. They worked great together. It was an entertaining feud.

Chris Clark: Jeff Jarrett and Razor Ramon's

battles for the IC belt almost outdid the heavyweight title picture in the WWF of 1995. Sandman vs. Douglas gets second because their feud expertly pitted fitness and wrestling against fatness and brawling. Vader vs. Orndorff's loser-leaves-WCW feud makes the top three because of its simple back room brutality.

Gary Miller: Raven vs. Dreamer was the hottest feud this year because all of the matches were exciting and bloody—even though Raven won every time.

Tim Dills: Tommy Dreamer vs. Raven was just odd enough to be interesting all year long. Some great work by both made this worth watching. Eddy Guerrero vs. Dean Malenko came in a close second. PG13 vs. Doug Gilbert & Tommy Rich takes third because it made the USWA really interesting for a while.

John Williams: It would be nice to cite several feuds that drew, but since that can't be done... Eddie Guerrero vs. Dean Malenko first for pure quality. Psicosis vs. Rey Misterio Jr. were involved in better matches throughout the year, but they drop to second when you throw out their matches south of the border. It's too bad, as they had both singles and tag matches in Mexico that were at a level above anything they did in ECW.

Bruce Mitchell: Eddie Guerrero vs. Dean Malenko. A real wrestling feud that provided a series of excellent matches that got the attention of the WCW booking committee, particularly Kevin Sullivan. 2. Raven vs. Tommy Dreamer. Raven and coterie, Steve Richards, Beulah, Cactus et al versus Dreamer, Pit Bulls, and whomever made for great interviews, creative angles, some wild brawls, and asked the question, "When is a hardcore fan just an a--h---?" 3. Hulk Hogan vs. Wrestling Fans. And this year Hogan won...

Chris Zavisa: The top three feuds were Cactus vs. Sandman, Eddie Guerrero vs. Dean Malenko, and The Public Enemy vs. The Gangstas. All three feuds that were worth viewing were found in the same promotion—ECW. First goes to the excellent series during the first half of the year pitting Cactus Jack against The Sandman. Although it is not in Cactus's current lexicon, this was hardcore to the max.

Eddie Guerrero vs. Dean Malenko was one excellent bout after another with one excellent move after another. It was a pleasure to see this and a surprise to see it in a promotion which is famous for the opposite.

With the lead-in The Public Enemy and The Gangstas had, this should have been first. However, the matches just did not live up to the anticipation despite some excellent sequences and unbelievable spots. This was an ideal match—up with two teams that are short on wrestling but long on intensity.

Wade Keller: Guerrero vs. Malenko, Psicosis vs. Rey Jr., and Sandman vs. Mikey Whipwreck all seemed to have a beginning, middle, and an end, good matches, and the latter great interviews.

8. MOST VALUABLE TEAM

The Public Enemy

1. The Public Enemy (38%)
2. Harlem Heat (10%)
3. Smoking Gunns (9%)
4. PG13 (9%)
4. Yokozuna & Owen Hart (9%)
5. The Pit Bulls (8%)

6-10) The Heavenly Bodies, Chris Benoit & Dean Malenko, The Gangstas, Raven & Steve Richards, Eliminators

PAST WINNERS:

1994: TPE, The Nasty Boys, Eddy Guerrero & Art Barr

1993: Heavenly Bodies, Hollywood Blondes, Steiner Brothers

1992: Steve Williams & Terry Gordy, Rick & Scott Steiner, Arn Anderson & Bobby Eaton

1991: Rick & Scott Steiner, Arn Anderson & Larry Zbyszko, The Rockers.

1990: Rick & Scott Steiner, Midnight Express, Butch Reed & Ron Simmons.

1989: Arn Anderson & Tully Blanchard, The Rockers, Road Warriors.

1988: Midnight Express, Fantastics, Road Warriors

AWARD COMMENTS

John Lister: The Public Enemy dominated tag wrestling and to realize Rocco Rock is Flair's age is astounding. Raven and Richards took the odd couple concept to a new level. The Smoking Gunns were sorely underrated by all sectors of the business and their actual teaming abilities were widely overlooked.

Steve James: Public Enemy dominated ECW in 1995. They performed some of the best highspots of the year including Rocco's moonsault off the top of the cage. Their jump to WCW should get them the national exposure they deserve. Harlem Heat didn't have a great year, but they take second place for being the best team in WCW. A serious with The Public Enemy

should help them. Third goes to the Smoking Gunns. Similar to Harlem Heat, they weren't spectacular, but were decent. They were the best of a weak lot in the WWF Tag Team Division. Tag team wrestling on a whole was weak in the U.S. this year.

Chris Clark: In a year where solid tag teams seemed to disappear from wrestling, The Public Enemy put the spotlight back on a team that looked and acted inseparable. The Nasty Boys need a jumpstart, but they are still pretty much what a tag team should be. PG13 worked hard and are over in a big way down in Memphis.

Joshua Christie: The Smoking Gunns improved vastly in a weak tag team division. Owen Hart & Yokozuna get second due to their surprising chemistry together while the Heavenly Bodies get the nod for third for putting on above average matches.

Matt Grady: TPE was the most valuable team in any promotion. They had some of the best brawls of the year and were the most over wrestlers in the world.

John Magee: I've got to go all-ECW on this one, as they had (and still have) the strongest bunch of tag teams in any U.S. promotion. Public Enemy wins easily. Raven & Richards were surprisingly good for what seemed like a make-shift team. Pit Bulls have really improved this year and will get better in '96.

Barry Johnson: The Public Enemy are the only team of the post-Road Warrior era to get the fans so excited and involved. They are afraid of nothing, get paid practically nothing, and seemed to love every minute of it. Great workrate, good gimmick and ring persona, and great at generating heat. Harlem Heat don't get any respect because they haven't been given any opponents. They could be great with time.

Jeffrey Cohen: Raven & Richards got the best tag team reaction I saw all year. The Public Enemy achieved their goal and got a shot in WCW. And Harlem Heat has remained in the title consensus despite the moronic Sherri-Parker angle.

Aron DeMars: The Public Enemy meant more to their promotion than anybody.

Ted Bauer: The Public Enemy is the only team who can get an entire building to dance with them or swarm a ring and dance with them. thus they land no. 1. Let's all hope WCW doesn't use them poorly. When the Pit Bulls work hard, they can be as good as anyone else. the Heavenly Bodies were sorely misused in the WWF, but SMW had an idea of how to use them. Their matches were always the best in SMW cards.

Bruno Arteaga: PG13 are good performers, the Public Enemy never fail to amaze me, and The Smoking Gunns are a good team despite the WWF's use of them.

Jason Amari: Who would have expected Owen Hart & Yokozuna to make such a strong team. Just goes to show how newly formed teams with contrasting personalities can work out.

Tom Quinn: Public Enemy, Sabu & Taz, and Benoit & Malenko were the three most over and talented teams anywhere. When they were put together, great action was always the result.

Chris Conroy: Hands down, The Public Enemy are the most exciting tag team in the U.S., however Harlem Heat has improved by leaps and bounds. I would like to see them in the WWF since WCW is seriously underutilizing them (what's new). Overall, another weak year for tag teams.

Chris Zavisa: Another ECW clean sweep. I remember being there at the ECW Arena the night TPE debuted their act working early on the card in some forgettable squashes. Both bled and I felt it was a horribly lame gimmick doomed to an early death. However, the miracle of the TV tube transformed them into great characters. They are not much as far as pure wrestlers go, but they certainly give it their all and hold nothing back.

How anyone could go from the laughable character of Johnny Polo in the WWF to the cold, brooding anti-hero Raven is a mystery. Or perhaps it's great casting. Stevie Richards is the perfect character to match with Raven and he does it extremely well. The hair, the too short shorts, the goofy grin, Richards is a great character. And their ring work, especially the Gangstas' Paradise card, was tremendous

I loved the Gangstas in SMW and while they lost some of their edge in ECW, they continued to wreak mayhem. Their feud against TPE was one of the better spots of the year. I hope these two can get their personal acts together so they have some type of future in this business.

Bruce Mitchell: Public Enemy. The Hoodies did a very effective job of staying within their limitations and having those ECW trademarked wild ass brawls. They earned their job in a national promotion. 2. PG13. Consistently had good matches all year both in the USWA and in SMW, and were the most popular act in Memphis, to boot. 3. Booker T. The one man tag team.

John Williams: The American wrestling scene has been struck by tag team blight. The less said the better. Public Enemy first.

Wade Keller: The Public Enemy were indeed the most valuable team to their promotion throughout 1995. In fact, they were one of only two teams that meant anything to their promotion. Second place goes to the other team, PG13, who aren't the next Fabulous Ones, but even top USWA brass consider them MVTs. I give The Gangstas no. 3 for giving TPE good opponents and for New Jack's incredible interviews.

9. BRAWLER OF THE YEAR

Cactus Jack

1. Cactus Jack (55%)
2. Sandman (12%)
3. The Public Enemy (8%)
4. Tommy Dreamer (8%)
5. Sabu (5%)

6-10) Vader, Raven, Razor Ramon, Terry Funk, Diesel

PAST WINNERS:

1994: Cactus Jack, Sabu, Vader

1993: Cactus, Vader, Terry Funk

1992: Cactus, Eddie Gilbert, Moondogs

1991: Cactus, Gilbert, Stan Hansen

AWARD COMMENTS

Tom Mansour: Cactus Jack. No one even came close.

Tom Quinn: Sandman gets first for continuing to be the best beer drinking, cigarette smoking, ass-kicking S.O.B. in ECW. Second goes to Sabu not only for his ECW work, but for introducing WCW fans to another style of wrestling, though (thankfully) only for a short time. Third goes to ECW's newest "Hardcore Hero," Tommy Dreamer. He totally made the transformation from pretty boy to great brawler.

Bruno Arteago: We all want to be like Sandman, not Michael Jordan. Raven gets me in a violent mood. And man, oh man, give Tommy Dreamer a cheese grater and...

Ted Bauer: Cactus Jack gives of himself to make the fans happy. This is a man who has been hit in the head by every single item in the city of Philadelphia and is still working (And cutting the best interviews in wrestling). Sandman is a good brawler as well, although his repertoire of moves is starting to expand, so this year he gets no. 2. The Public Enemy are wild enough to moonsault someone through three tables (and off the top of a cage, no less).

Jeffrey Cohen: Cactus Jack cannot win this award next year because he'll be in the WWF. So discount him for '96 and let's see where he lands after jobbing for Michaels and Hart.

John Magee: Cactus Jack wins for his efforts with, among others, Sandman and Terry Funk. Public Enemy, whose brawls with assorted fan-supplied instruments look like a rumble at Home Depot, provided for plenty of excitement all year against a variety of opponents. Terry Funk comes in third, even though he worked only

a part-time schedule in the U.S.

John Lister: Raven added an unprecedented degree of psychology to the traditional punch and kick style. Funk showed he is at least a couple of miles past the famous crossed line. Public Enemy should earn a tourism award for their trips around the ECW Arena.

Oscar Dronjak: Sandman is impervious to pain. Must be all that beer.

Eric McHugh: This is always the hardest category to rank. My top three are TPE, Dreamer, and Funk. Raven gets a special mention for showing us a side we never knew he had.

Jason Hawkins: Cactus Jack, Public Enemy, and Gangstas. Is it any coincidence that all of the good brawlers worked for ECW this year?

Marshall Goldberg: Tommy Dreamer gets the Abby award for most blood lost during the year.

Matt Grady: Cactus Jack, Sandman, and TPE. Cactus is one of the best brawlers ever. This year he had no limits in ECW and had great brawls in most of his matches. Sandman really improved this year and is a great brawler in his own right. TPE were excellent this year as well. ECW has the best brawlers in the world.

Gary Miller: Tommy Dreamer, because of his great brawling activities, became a superstar of the '90s. If Tommy wasn't the best brawler, he'd still be a squash guy.

Adam Hopkins: Cactus Jack was excellent this year before deciding that he was "sick of being hardcore." And Sabu is one of the few wrestlers who can combine excellent brawling with fantastic high flying.

James Zordani: Cactus Jack is hardcore. He lays his body on the line too much. I admire him for the punishment he takes, but I have to wonder is it really worth it? The man has lost an ear and who knows how many injuries he has incurred over the years. TPE put it on the line like no other tag team. Their wars in ECW are unparalleled. Sandman is not just a gimmick wrestler anymore. He brawled with Cactus Jack, Shane Douglas, Mikey Whipwreck, TPE, and anybody else in ECW I watched him against in 1995.

Brian Yursha: Cactus Jack was the best brawler. His match against Terry Funk at Hostile City Showdown was one of his best brawls this year. It was a very brutal match and I'm looking forward to seeing Cactus in the WWF in '96. The Public Enemy get second. They had some great brawls this year, especially with the Gangstas. Terry

Funk and Sandman tie for third. Funk was great whenever he faced Cactus Jack. Sandman is a great brawler. He had great brawls against Cactus Jack and Mikey Whipwreck.

Chris Clark: It's an ECW sweep, but how could this category be anything but. Hardcore or not, Tommy Dreamer put up a good fight in ECW. Likewise, Sandman was more brawler than wrestler and The Public Enemy brought some staggering gore and brutality to the table, if you will.

Chris Zavisa: Cactus Jack, Rocco Rock, and Sandman. Nobody can rip up an arena the way Cactus does and maintain a sense of keeping the match together at the same time. Rocco Rock going through one table after another sometimes on the same move is something to behold. Stacked tables, burning tables, broken tables, they all fell victim to Rocco. And when I think that this guy is not much younger than I am, the mind boggles. Sandman had a scrapbook full of spots outside the ring that caused you to cringe and shake your head in disbelief. People used to say Cactus would be in a wheelchair within five years and that proved thankfully false. What then is the prognosis for Sandman?

Bruce Mitchell: Public Enemy. Brawl is all they do, and all they can do. Sandman gets second. It's all he does. The Heavenly Bodies get third for having some pretty bloody brawls with the Dirty White Boy and Tracy Smothers in SMW.

John Williams: Rocco Rock, first. Sandman, second. Johnny Grunge, third. But for the sheer cringe factor, one should search out tapes of Yumiko Hotta, Aja Kong, and Dynamite Kansai. When it comes to putting a serious and believable beating on an opponent, these three ladies know how to do it.

Wade Keller: This is a category that is obviously dominated by ECW because ECW has the style that lets good brawlers be featured. The best brawlers aren't all in ECW, but the brawlers who are showcasing their abilities the most often are. The best brawls on a scale of sheer guts and determination came from The Public Enemy in ECW. While Grunge bled and whacked people, Rocco was brawling all over ECW Arena crashing tables and being crashed through tables. That said, first place goes to Cactus Jack who set the pace for hardcore brawls and while not as acrobatic as Rocco, had better psychology during the matches. Third place goes to Vader because he was a brawler who not only dished it out, but for a big man, sold effectively during brawls, which is an important element of brawling. His believability and credibility factors were higher than most in this category. Honorable mention go to Sandman, Raven, Dreamer, Stevie Richards, Mikey Whipwreck, The Pit Bulls, The Gangstas, and other ECW regulars for a year of sacrificing themselves for the fans.

10. BEST AERIAL WRESTLER

Rey Misterio Jr.

1. Rey Misterio Jr. (35%)
2. Sabu (33%)
3. Eddie Guerrero (20%)
4. Too Cold Scorpio (5%)
5. Rocco Rock (3%)

6-10) Psicosis, 1-2-3 Kid, Shawn Michaels, Chris Benoit, Hakushi

PAST WINNERS:

1994: Sabu, Rey Jr., Scorpio

1993: Too Cold Scorpio, 1-2-3 Kid, Sabu

1992: Jushin Thunder Liger, Brian Pillman, Lightning Kid

1991: Jushin Thunder Liger, Brian Pillman, Lightning Kid (first year as category).

AWARD COMMENTS

John Lister: Rey Misterio Jr. fought gravity. Sabu fought furniture. And Hakushi fought the legacy of the Warlord et al.

Matt Grady: First goes to Rey Misterio Jr. Not only was he the best in the U.S., he was the best in the world. He surpassed the Great Sasuke. Sabu places second for his craziness. Psicosis is a great aerial wrestler, too. His matches with Misterio were incredible.

Annette Boyer: Rey Misterio Jr. is amazing. A gifted and fearless flyer who amazes me every time I see him.

James Janota: Sabu's disregard for his body is amazing and it adds a definition to his aerial ability. Shawn Michaels leads over Sabu because of his moonsault from the ladder at SummerSlam. Eddie Guerrero gets top kudos for how easy he makes high-flying look.

R. McMahon: Rey Misterio Jr. shows no fear whatsoever in doing his craft. He is truly fascinating to watch. Too Cold Scorpio, in my opinion, is very underrated overall. His aerial tactics are truly a sight to see.

Jason Hawkins: Sabu is awesome and risks more than anyone in the business. Finally Chris Benoit is getting used right. Brian Pillman continued to live up to his nickname.

Eric McHugh: Rey Misterio Jr. is incredible. He gives me hope, as I'm about his size and dream of this as a career. Johnny B. Badd continues to get better by the match. Special mention to Mikey Whipwreck as well.

John Magee: Rey Misterio Jr. is just ahead of Sabu due to his imagination creating newer, riskier moves every time he gets in the ring. Eddie Guerrero is third, showing that indeed a lucha style can be successfully blended with a Japanese and/or American ring style.

Mike Malesev: Eddie Guerrero is the best around in aerial moves and is probably the best wrestler in the U.S. today. Sabu continues to risk his body to keep the fans on their feet. Shawn Michaels kept us in awe of his great moves and bumps he took in '95, especially the ladder match.

Barry Johnson: Though very controversial this year, Sabu continued to dominate the 10 to 15 feet above the ring. He increased his table shots, and finally got a small amount of national exposure, and finally ended up where he belongs—back in ECW. 1-2-3 Kid makes a better heel than face and moved up a notch in 1995. Chris Benoit is finally beginning to be used correctly. He defies logic with flying ability that doesn't match his build.

Jeffrey Cohen: Rey Misterio Jr. is so innovative, he should be shot before he kills himself. Hopefully with the WCW/AAA alliance, I will be seeing him live. And alive.

Ted Bauer: I saw two ECW TV shows this year and Guerrero's matches were enough to convince me he deserves no. 1.

Jason Amari: Soaring from the top turnbuckle to the outside of the ring became routine for Michaels. Splashes from the ladder and flying elbows earn Michaels the top spot.

Robert O'Connor: Rey Misterio Jr. is as good as it gets in this category. His ECW bouts with Psicosis were all classics. I hope those two will get the chance to work together in WCW.

Brian Yursha: The first time I saw Rey Misterio Jr. was when he wrestled Psicosis on ECW TV. I was very impressed and couldn't believe some of the aerial moves that he does. He is really incredible. Sabu is next because he will do anything in the air. I want to see Sabu have a match against Misterio Jr. Sabu is amazing. Too Cold Scorpio is third. Scorpio did some incredible moves in the air. His moonsaults are incredible.

Chris Clark: Rocco Rock is a fearless flyboy. Only time will tell if the big two suffocate his talents. Sabu, number two, had that chance and decided he'd rather fly than cooperate. And Eddie Guerrero is on his way to becoming the next Rick Steamboat, only he flies higher and faster.

Gary Miller: To sum it up in three words: Rey Misterio Jr. Nothing else has to be said.

John Molinaro: Rey Misterio Jr. is the human highlight film of wrestling. No other wrestler can

even come close to what this kid does. His moves defy description.

Adam Hopkins: Every time I see Sabu in a match, he tries something new and innovative. Rey Misterio Jr. and Psicosis had a great match in ECW Arena and showed how excellent Misterio can be. And Eddie Guerrero will go a long way if WCW lets him.

Phil Breen: Rey Misterio Jr. is a phenom. He has no peers.

Eric Meringer: Rey Misterio Jr. is just awesome and nobody can beat him in terms of flying.

Tom Quinn: Sabu, Rey Misterio Jr. and Chris Benoit. Sabu maintains this title because he kept up his pace of being the most Suicidal, Homicidal, Genocidal, and Death Defying Athlete on the face of the Earth. Rey Misterio gets a very close second for doing some of the most amazing moves I've ever seen anyone do. Third goes to Benoit for being the best all-around wrestler and doing some of the best highspots in ECW.

John Williams: Sabu is not a flyer, but rather a stunt man with a death wish. That doesn't make the grade here. Shinjiro Otani is not the most spectacular flyer around. But on a worldwide basis, no one incorporates flying into their matches as smoothly and logically as Otani. Still, Rey Misterio Jr. is too revolutionary, too amazing and does so much flying in a match that not putting him first would be ignorance on the part of any fan.

Chris Zavisa: Rey Misterio Jr. is the best flyer in the world. If there is any justice, he will gain more exposure this year flying right into the hearts of casual fans everywhere.

The aerial spots Psicosis employs are not as spectacular as Misterio, but are awesome all the same. He goes through the ropes, over the ringpost, and off the tops of cages. I love his Santo leap off the top into a senton to the arena floor.

Sabu was not as visible this year due to his squabble with ECW and an expanded New Japan schedule. But when he did work, he let it all fly without any regard to his own well being.

Bruce Mitchell: Rey Misterio Jr.. He is reinventing the genre of aerial wrestling before our eyes, just as Jushin Liger and Tiger Mask did before him. High athleticism, high risk, high innovation, high intensity, high in the air...

2. Psicosis. Misterio's opponent in the series has his own innovations to offer. Great name, too.

3. Too Cold Scorpio. A precise aerialist who is underrated in several areas of his act.

Wade Keller: Rey Misterio Jr., Sabu, and Psicosis were the top three fliers in the U.S. in 1995 followed by Flyboy Rocco Rock and Too Cold Scorpio. If you were to divide 100 points among all the aerial wrestlers in the U.S. in 1995, those five would get 95 of the points with the rest being divided among Hakushi, Kid, Benoit, Guerrero, and a few others. The top five add grace and innovation to sheer guts to shock us out of our chairs.

11. BEST MAJOR EVENT

SummerSlam '95

1. SummerSlam (37%)
2. Starrcade '95 (24%)
3. Survivor Series (20%)
4. Royal Rumble (8%)
5. Wrestlemania XI (5%)

6-10) In Your House 2, ECW Gangstas Paradise, SMW SuperBowl, In Your House 5, World War III

PAST WINNERS:

1994: Wrestlemania X, AAA When World's Collide, Spring Stampede

1993: SuperBrawl, King of the Ring, SummerSlam

1992: Royal Rumble, Wrestlemania VIII, SuperBrawl II

1991: WCW WrestleWar '91, WCW SuperBrawl I, WCW Japan Supershow.

1990: WCW Great American Bash, WWF Wrestlemania VI, Starrcade '90.

1989: NWA Great American Bash, NWA WrestleWar '89, NWA Chi-Town Rumble.

AWARD COMMENTS

Tom Quinn: The workrate on Survivor Series was far above average for the WWF and all of the angles went over well. Second goes to ECW's Feb. 25 "Return of the Funker." Not only did the National Treasure Terry Funk return to North America, but this card had great angles and matches—everything a wrestling card should have. Third goes to SMW's SuperBowl of Wrestling. It featured stars from many different groups and put on a great night of wrestling.

Brian Keenan: WCW could learn a lot from the build-up and presentation of Wrestlemania XI. It didn't have the best action of the year, but with all the mainstream media attention, it really seemed like something special.

Jason Amari: The Dec. 17 In Your House featuring the return of Jeff Jarrett and a more hardcore wrestling style made this event unique. Helmsley showed his potential and Hart vs. Smith was a classic.

David Goldberg: After a horrible year of pay-per-views for WCW, I was shocked to see Starrcade '95. Despite what someone said about Starrcade, there was not a bad match on the card. Also, WCW actually utilized all of their talent, only using the good wrestlers and leaving out

Hogan and friends. All of the wrestlers on the card seemed to be working their hardest.

Ted Bauer: SummerSlam gets no. 1 for providing the Match of the Year in Michaels vs. Ramon. The Great American Bash had two bookends that were way above anything WCW had done before that and is currently doing. Starrcade was very good, but since no one watching had any idea who the wrestlers were, it diluted the impact, thus gets no. 3.

Brian Yursha: SummerSlam gets first because of the strong workrate. There were three great matches (ladder match, Hakushi vs. Kid, and Skip vs. Horowitz) and a couple of good matches. Almost everyone on the card worked hard.

Chris Clark: For the first time in a long time, after 1995's Royal Rumble, I came away from a WWF event without bile rising in my throat. It was a treat to watch. The rest of this category belongs to anything by ECW. Like something from a deformity, they force you to take notice—and they work their butts off doing it.

Jimmy Marshall: No one professional wrestling event was good enough to even warrant a no. 1 vote. The UFC6 gave the fans what they wanted and more.

Gary Miller: Halloween Havoc was the best pay-per-view because WCW has gotten so stupid that I liked it. First the monster truck competition. You thought that was bad, then the Giant falls off the roof.

Brian Diericks: No so-called "SuperCard" lived up to that title better than SummerSlam. There was not one unbearable match on the entire card and that is not something you can say very often. Even the poor Diesel-Mabel match was watchable because it was so short. The whole combination of storyline and quality wrestling matches made it a very enjoyable show.

Jeffrey Cohen: Starrcade took over once again as the premier event, and Savage, Sting, and Luger had nothing to do with it. Wrestlemania was edged out because the first two hours were substandard. ECW finally hitting Queens was a major event which should have repercussions in 1996.

Barry Johnson: The debut of Monday Nitro is first. The Flair-Sting match, the surprise return of Luger, and Liger facing Pillman made this the most exciting, fast-paced hour of wrestling in recent history. From top to bottom, everyone worked hard at Starrcade and each match seemed meaningful due to the WCW vs. New Japan idea and the title shot for the triangle match winner. Great finish with Flair winning, and the Horsemen

finally came to prominence again at the end of the show. Survivor Series '95 was great with Bret vs. Diesel, Michaels showing off, and Sid almost shining, along with the new Undertaker gimmick and the women's match.

Mike Malesev: Starrcade had pure wrestling and no cartoon gimmicks. Only one or two screwjobs. Plus a major upset of Flair getting the title back. The best WCW pay-per-view of the year.

John Magee: SMW SuperBowl gets first place for giving samples of almost every style of match on one tremendous card. The December In Your House is up there not just for its action, but because it was such a departure from the usual WWF pay-per-view (and hopefully a sign of things to come). ECW Gangstas Paradise is up there because it, like SuperBowl, had a little bit of everything for everyone.

John Williams: Sandwiched between two straight nights of AAA cards, UFC6 stood out as a compelling event. Taktarov vs. Abbot and Shamrock vs. Severn remain two of the defining moments in the UFC.

Chris Zavisa: The best shows all year came out of the ECW Arena. Two of the best were on September 16 with those two great tag team main events plus Psicosis and Misterio Jr. thrown in as a bonus. It had the match of the year, the payoff to the angle of the year, and two of the best flyers found anywhere.

Their Hostile City Showdown card was nearly as good with Public Enemy and The Gangstas brawling all over the building, Sandman and Cactus in a barbed wire bloodbath, the Rottens tearing each other's skin off in a glass death match, plus Luna Vachon applying the claw to the crotch of Stevie Richards. Tremendous.

Best show from the Big Two was the WWF's SummerSlam with the excellent ladder matches, involving Michaels and Ramon plus two very good bouts involving Kid and Hakushi and the Cinderella story of Horowitz and Skip. But make no mistake about it, the ECW shows blow this one away.

Bruce Mitchell: UFC6. An exciting sporting event capped off by a gutsy performance by Tank Abbott in a losing effort against Oleg Taktarov.

2. The debut of Monday Nitro. The shocking appearance of Lex Luger let everyone know that this wasn't just another TV wrestling show.

3. Wrestlemania XI. This was a pretty cool spectacle, what with L.T., Salt 'n' Pepa, Pam Anderson, and that NYPD Blue guy. It had some solid wrestling, too. Bam Bam Bigelow did a miraculous job in the main event, for all the good it ultimately did him.

Wade Keller: UFC6, SummerSlam, and ECW Sept. 16. UFC6 provided more drama through reality than a worked event could muster.

12. MANAGER OF THE YEAR

Jim Cornette

1. Jim Cornette (27%)
2. Woman (18%)
3. Sunny (18%)
4. Paul E. Dangerously (12%)
5. Ted DiBiase (10%)
- 6-10) Sister Sherri, Jimmy Hart, Col. Parker, Brandon Baxter, Scott Bowden

PAST WINNERS:

- 1993: Jim Cornette, Tammy Fytch, Paul E. Dangerously
1992: Paul E. Dangerously, Jim Cornette, Ron Wright
1991: Paul E. Dangerously, Sensational Sherri, Paul Bearer.
1990: Jim Cornette, Bobby Heenan, Sensational Sherri.
1989: Jim Cornette, Bobby Heenan, Paul E. Dangerously.
1988: Jim Cornette, Paul E. Dangerously, Bobby Heenan.

AWARD COMMENTS

John Lister: Sunny established Candido as a majorly over heel despite being many fans' favorite attraction. Woman completed the Sandman package and made a great mouthpiece during his frequent spells of dazed confusion. DiBiase brought legitimacy to a pitiful stable.

John Magee: Not too many real strong contenders this year as Jim Cornette didn't really do a lot until starting up the Militia later in the year. Give the nod to Parker and Sherri, just for making some of the WCW stuff entertaining.

Jeffrey Cohen: Jim Cornette gets a posthumous nod.

Ted Bauer: Paul E. Dangerously featured himself in his feud with Bill Alfonso. Not only is he the funniest manager in wrestling, he draws excellent crowd heat. He gets no. 1. Woman is good as well. Her outfits are sometimes the only saving grace for bad matches. Cornette, perhaps the greatest ringside manager in the history of pro wrestling, simply ran out of steam in 1995.

Tom Quinn: Paul E. Dangerously gets first for being so over with the ECW fans, and doing a great job with the mic. Second goes to Jim Cornette for his work in SMW and his work with Davey Boy Smith in the WWF. Third goes to Sunny for being every on-line user's favorite

wrestling personality. A very weak year for the managers.

Chris Conroy: Managers play less of a role than they did 10 or 15 years ago. My votes for Sunny, Beulah, and Goldust's Usher reflect that.

Eric McHugh: Woman rules. Cornette was great in SMW. I believe Jason would get over in the WWF.

David Frey: A terrible year for managers. Only Jim Cornette comes to mind and he had an off year given his troubles in SMW.

Adam Hopkins: It seems every year managers get more and more invisible. Jim Cornette began to be used effectively in the WWF with Bulldog and some of his interviews were really good. Sunny is excellent and once she moves toward managing a main event wrestler, her talents should be able to shine. Ted DiBiase started to show a good deal of talent during the year, but still only gets third place.

Tim Dills: Jim Cornette wins because he became more prominent in the WWF this year and was always active and entertaining in the WWF. Sister Sherri takes no. 2 because no other manager takes better bumps. Woman gets third place for a consistent year in ECW.

Chris Clark: Although Jim Cornette's usual vocal fire ran cold in 1995, he was still the crazed mastermind guiding SMW's talent. Woman and Sister Sherri round out the top three because, although the role of the manager is dying out in wrestling, they still give the crowd a rise.

Jason Hawkins: Sister Sherri worked hard all year. Paul E. was great when he was on camera. Cornette isn't one-third of what he once was, but is simply the best of the rest.

Jason Husby: Woman was far and away the best manager. Her gold digging seductress role was perfect. Jim Cornette and Paul E. Dangerously were the best of what's left.

Tony Martin: Jim Cornette will hopefully get more interview time now that he's a full-time worker in the WWF. As long as he manages, he will always be manager of the year.

Ken Raftery: Woman gets first for playing the alluring role so well and for generating heat at ringside. Sunny gets second because her annoying persona was one of the reasons it was so fun to see Barry Horowitz beat Skip. She'll do better in '96 if she doesn't mumble her words so much and cause us to miss half of what she says. Paul Bearer gets third for some great interviews and hard work at ringside.

Matt Grady: This was a bad year for managers

once again. Jim Cornette was great in SMW this year. He carried many wrestlers. It's too bad about SMW. Paul E. Dangerously gets third. Even with a diminished role he was better than most. Brandon Baxter gets third.

James Zordani: Woman plays her role as a manager better than anyone else. I loved when she taunted Mikey Whipwreck as Sandman was about to cane him as a result of the Singapore caning match in Florida. Jim Cornette made bad matches enjoyable in the WWF.

Joshua Christie: Jim Cornette did it all in 1995. He was by far the best heel voice in all the WWF and managed to get all of his proteges over well. His spots and bumps during matches were often the highlight of the evening and most of the time the only salvation we had. Tammy Fytch is a remarkable talent who is finally coming into her own in the WWF. She's a natural at everything she does and is quickly building herself up to be one of the WWF's most valuable assets.

Chris Zavis: Not a good year for managerial talent. Paul E. Dangerously severely curtailed his own time with the mic after losing Sabu and allowing the wrestling talent to take over. A bold move for a promoter and booker but it hurt his exposure. Still, he was the best of the bunch without much competition.

Jim Cornette is still wonderful but his SMW work was taken down a peg or two with his WWF work. There were WWF matches where I had to check the scoresheet to see who that was at ringside with the tennis racket, loud sportcoat and who did next to nothing.

Woman seemed a good pairing with Sandman and it grew on me as the year developed. The old Rick Steiner/Robin skit showed Nancy can do more than just the limited role Paul Heyman allows her to do and lets hope we see a more versatile Woman in the future.

Bruce Mitchell: Raven. His Gen X "F--- 'em all" attitude is a stale new breath of air in a wrestling world full of old, recycled management ideas.

2. Sunny. She doesn't get much heat in the WWF (what manager does?), but she's pretty entertaining.

3. Jim Cornette. The General Jimmy act was a self-indulgent embarrassment, but he can still do those interviews explaining goofy match stip better than anyone.

John Williams: Tammy "Sunny" Fytch is more fun to watch than any other manager in the business. Knowing that's for purely non-analytical reasons, she gets dropped behind Jim Cornette in a naked attempt to maintain my credibility.

Wade Keller: Woman portrayed her seductive leadership role well and her interviews were always concise and believable. Sunny gets second place for generating great heat and also being totally believable in her role. Sherri gets third for her work at ringside and sometimes on the mic.

13. BEST BROADCASTER

Joey Styles

1. Joey Styles (20%)
2. Jerry Lawler (18%)
3. Jim Ross (17%)
4. Vince McMahon (17%)
5. Bobby Heenan (10%)

6-10) Lance Russell, Mike Tenay, Chris Cruise, Tony Schiavone, Todd Pettengill

PAST WINNERS:

1994: Heenan, Ross, McMahon

1993: Heenan, Ross, McMahon

1992: Ross, Heenan, Schiavone
(Before 1992, announcers and color commentators were separate categories.)

Announcer of the Year:

1991: Ross, Schiavone, McMahon.

1990: Ross, Schiavone, McMahon.

1989: Ross, Schiavone, Lance Russell.

1988: Ross, Ventura, Russell.

Color Commentator of the Year:

1991: Heenan, Paul E. Dangerously, Scotty "The Body" Anthony.

1990: Ventura, Paul E. Dangerously, Roddy Piper.

1989: Ventura, Jim Cornette, Michael Hayes.

AWARD COMMENTS

Chris Conroy: No one can carry a storyline like McMahon and Lawler. Wrestlemania and L.T. vs. Bigelow demonstrated that. They also quarrel but unlike the McMahon and Jesse Ventura team, I don't believe it takes away from the action or overshadows it. Joey Styles is great on play by play, but McMahon carries a storyline better.

Tom Quinn: Joey Styles was by far the most credible, honest, and knowledgeable announcer on the air this year. Jim Ross gets second for continuing to be the shining light in the WWF's broadcast crew. Third goes to ever feisty Lance Russell, who is one of the most entertaining grumpy old men in wrestling.

Brian Keenan: Jim Ross still sets the standard for honesty and integrity. I wish they would have let him call the Lawrence Taylor match. Joey Styles is by far the quickest wit among

announcers. A surprise third is Dok Hendrix, for his high energy and objectivity after getting off to a rough start with Titan. I got a kick out of his "c'mon Razor, c'mon Shawn" call of the ladder match.

Bruno Artega: Joey Styles. Enough said. Oh my God! Jerry Lawler is quick witted and his cheap shots are great. Lance Russell has respect and gets me laughing, especially with Cory Macklin.

R.D. Murray: Bobby Heenan is just so funny.

Ted Bauer: Joey Styles is the only laugh out loud funny broadcaster there is on TV. Perhaps if Heenan read papers produced in the 1900s, he could regain his witty edge. This year, however, Styles win.

Brian Yursha: Joey Styles is my top choice because he calls every maneuver by its correct name and he always makes every ECW show exciting with his great commentary and jokes. Vince McMahon gets second because he makes every match exciting and entertaining. Jim Ross gets third. Ross has great knowledge of the sport and I like when he talks about the history of some of the wrestlers. Jerry Lawler was the best color commentator.

Keith Legaz: Joey Styles's enthusiastic calling of the moves combined with his extreme sense of humor makes him the first wrestling broadcaster that we Generation Xers can honestly enjoy.

Chris Clark: Joey Styles gets first because he is best at calling a spot and is too busy insulting rival promotions to insult his own fans. Jerry Lawler gets second place because he still makes me laugh and Jim Ross gets third because he still doesn't.

Aron DeMars: Mike Tenay proved that great announcing gets unknown talent over. It is much more pleasant to hear a genuinely enthused voice call the moves properly and consistently. He also came across as well-prepared and knowledgeable. It disgusts and annoys me to hear unprepared stooges saying "hype, hype hype" while not even paying attention to the match in the ring. (Who can blame them, as most of the matches stink.) Most announcers spend too much time trying to get themselves over instead of the wrestlers. If the announcers don't care, why should the fans?

Jeff Cohen: Oh my God! Joey Styles already has a catch-phrase after less than two years in the spotlight. He got almost as big a pop as the Sandman when ECW came to Queens. I can't wait until they put him in an angle. Jeff Blatnick of UFC showed you don't have to talk down to your audience or try to get yourself over. Mike Tenay was good on any WCW show when they let him open his mouth and not make fun of him for calling the moves correctly.

Barry Johnson: Bobby Heenan continues to come up with some great one-liners to agitate Mean Gene and good ol' Tony, and he has a good spot on wrestling's best new show, Monday Nitro, fighting with Steve McMichael and Eric Bischoff every week. Vince McMahon is "unquestionably" the best WWF announcer. Jerry Lawler has the greatest quality a heel announcer can possibly have. He is annoying enough to make Jesse Ventura seem sweet. His one-liners are the best anywhere, and he knows how to keep McMahon on his toes throughout even the less-interesting shows of Raw.

John Magee: Joey Styles is an easy pick. He's funny, knows the moves, can be a smart-ass when he needs to be. Lance Russell's still a classic and can make even the worst USWA match worth watching. Chip Kessler, considering he just got into doing play-by-play, was pretty good even with the lack of experience.

John Lister: Joey Styles continued with hilarious put-downs and great calling of the ring action. Jim Ross brought outstanding credibility to major matches through his Action Zone segments. Jerry Lawler lacked Bobby Heenan's natural wit but at least knew which decade it was.

John Williams: Other than Joey Styles, the only person in the U.S. who can call a match was last seen wandering aimlessly around a slop pen decked out in sharp pair of overalls. Styles wins both on the merits and on lack of competition.

Chris Zavisa: Joey Styles is so manic, so rabid, so over the top, that it is impossible to imagine him in any other promotion. He and ECW go well together.

Tony Schiavone gets second because he tried mightily to stay on a professional level while everything around him seemed intent on sabotaging his best efforts. I give him a ton of credit for hanging in there and at least making the effort.

Chris Cruise did not get much exposure but he was a whole lot better than the rest of the WCW shills who kept the better announcing spots for themselves.

Bruce Mitchell: Joey Styles. Already more knowledgeable than most announcers, and eager to learn, Styles came into his own as the best in the business this year. He is a major reason why the ECW television show is so good.

Bruce Beck. UFC's play-by-play man added credibility to a product that many, for a variety of reasons, doubted.

Chip Kessler. He did a solid, workmanlike job in the final days of SMW. He was better than anyone in the same position in the "Big Two."

Wade Keller: Joey Styles for all of the already stated reasons. Best color commentator was Jeff Blatnick, who knew his subject and called it honestly. Third place goes to Jim Ross, who can still take an exciting match up a notch better than anyone. McMahon fell into too many McCliches. Honorable mention to Jerry Lawler for making me smile and sometimes getting over angles.

14. BOOKER OF THE YEAR

Paul Heyman

1. Paul Heyman (42%)
2. Vince McMahon (28%)
3. Jim Cornette (12%)
4. Randy Hales (6%)
5. Kevin Sullivan (4%)

6-10) Antonio Pena, Ric Flair, Pat Patterson, Bill Watts, Paul Orndorff

PAST WINNERS:

1994: Heyman, McMahon, Pena
(formerly "Promoter of the Year")
1993: Cornette, McMahon, Heyman
1992: Cornette, McMahon, Frey

AWARD COMMENTS

John Lister: Paul Heyman bucked all the rules while rarely disappointing his customers. Vince's successful ideas vastly overshadowed his inevitable disasters. Patterson's legacy will be the perfectly scripted Hart-Diesel epics.

Adam Hopkins: Sorry WCW but McMahon and Co. are still no. 1. The booker of the L.T. vs. Bigelow angle and the Shawn Michaels collapse were both brilliantly done. No other booker would have been able to pull both off as effectively. Even though there were some lows, they kept their focus through some rough times and survived.

Lee Schwartz: Paul Heyman, period. While the entire wrestling industry heads in one direction, Heyman took a 180 degree turn. He's not afraid to take chances and succeeds more than he fails. Compelling angles and a keen eye for wrestling talent are his trademark. They say that imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. Paul, you should be flattered.

Phil Breen: ECW gives me everything I want. Surprises, believability, hard workers, and respect. They don't play us for fools. Paul Heyman and the rest of the ECW crew have revolutionized professional wrestling.

Robert O'Connor: Paul Heyman and ECW have had more than their share of critics during 1995, but what other promotion could survive the loss of so many of its top names to the "Big Two" and still continue to be among the most innovative and talked about promotions ever.

John Magee: Paul Heyman. Period. No one else could take a blend of WCW/WWF castoffs, guys between Japanese tours, independent guys who couldn't get a break, and others that he came

across and turned a seven match card into a seven course gourmet meal. The master chef makes every hour of television and every live show into a guessing game, because you never know what he'll come up with next. Jim Cornette and Randy Hales are second and third simply because they managed to come up with solid stuff all year with a minimal budget and a limited talent base from which to draw fans.

Barry Johnson: Vince McMahon came up with some original stuff this year, made a respectable champion out of Diesel, gave Shawn Michaels the freedom to show just how good he really is, and gave a few deserving wrestlers a push, like Razor, The Kid, Jarrett, Douglas, and Ahmed Johnson. Paul Heyman kept ECW's momentum going in the right direction even after losing so many big names such as Sabu, Chris Benoit, Dean Malenko, and Eddie Guerrero. By adding the Steiners and giving Cactus Jack and Taz more prominent roles, he made ECW stronger in points in which I didn't even notice they were weak. Third goes to Kevin Sullivan. The Dungeon of Doom may be a little corny, but Sullivan did come up with some good stuff this year. His use of the Giant was creative and since he is the only one in WCW with much power besides Hogan, he must be doing something right.

Jeffrey Cohen: Paul Heyman books to perfection given his talent pool. Antonio Pena screws up the booking, but look at the talent he has to work with.

Aron DeMars: Paul Heyman had a lot going against him: The Sabu no-show, the departure of Douglas, WCW swiping Benoit, Guerrero, and Malenko, and now his most over act, Public Enemy leaving. Yet he always delivers surprises and new twists. I just wish he wouldn't go overboard all the time. Pena had a lot of adversity as well: Love Machine's death, the economy's collapse, Santo's departure, Fuerza and Panther's defection, etc. He did better than most in his situation would have.

Ted Bauer: Paul Heyman produced the Dudleys, the funniest characters in wrestling. He has let Cactus talk openly about the industry, and that has produced some of the best interviews in history. He books angles and matches that grab you, not Monster Truck challenges with freaky giants falling off roofs.

Jason Amari: Vince McMahon's ideas are surpassed by none and imitated by many. As long as McMahon is in control, the WWF will always be the leading organization.

Tom Quinn: Paul Heyman gets this again for continuing on in 1994 by booking the best angles,

matches, wrestlers, and television product in wrestling. Vince McMahon gets second for his new approaches and adapting to the changing wrestling fans' tastes. Third goes to the USWA's Randy Hales for still drawing good crowds with the same workers every week, and making it compelling.

Chris Conroy: ECW definitely had some extreme action and Heyman has proved he is the best booker in the world by constantly coming up with surprises and thrills with the talent he has to work with. I would love to see what he could do in the WWF. If he ever took that job, WCW would really be in trouble. Even though Hogan is still there and the "biggest" heel is wrongfully billed as the "Son of Andre," Kevin Sullivan must be doing something right since WCW has turned around a bit since he began booking. But please, no more Dungeon of Doom skits. If Heyman won't book the WWF, I would like to see what Jim Cornette could do.

Chris Zavisa: Paul Heyman's ECW was again the most exciting, innovative promotion to watch. We do not get their TV here but I would inhale those tapes when they arrived. Without Heyman's ECW, U.S. wrestling would be a vast wasteland. He alone in this country has the ability to consistently create new characters that capture fans' imaginations. He stages the best cards in the business. He is so far ahead of every other promotion in this country it is scary.

Cornette seemed to get more out of less than anyone thought possible. The effort he put in for most of 1995 will hopefully not go forgotten. I loved his use of Al Snow both in the ring and on the mic. Sure, a lot of what he did was tired and derivative, but when it worked it was darn good.

Antonio Pena has the advantage of a great crop of youngsters who are willing to do almost anything for him. He only gets third though since you would think all that talent would produce TV much better than it is week after week.

Bruce Mitchell: Paul Heyman. ECW's "Evil Genius" put together a great year of smart, hip, wild television and created an audience atmosphere that bordered, and went over, that border completely at least once on dangerous anarchy. Second is Randy Hales. Hales had a profitable run in Memphis with the USWA vs. SMW feud. Memphis can be a difficult place to book, what with all of the interests to be served there. Hales did a consistent job for most of the year with not much to work with. Jim Cornette is third. As Johnny Weaver used to sing on WorldWide, "Turn out the lights, the party's over."

John Williams: Paul Heyman is the only U.S. booker who can be cited while maintaining a straight face. Every other booker in the U.S. needs to be sent back to Booking 101 to learn the basics.

Wade Keller: Paul Heyman, Vince McMahon, and Randy Hales. Hales has kept the USWA flavor alive and was at times very good in '95.

15-44: SECONDARY CATEGORIES

The following are the results of the Secondary Awards. The top five or top ten finishers in each category are listed (depending on how many received considerable votes) followed by the picks of Torch columnists and editor. If an asterick appears next to the top finisher, that means they had at least twice as many votes as the second place finisher.

15. BEST WORKRATE

- 1) Shawn Michaels *
- 2) Eddie Guerrero
- 3) Chris Benoit
- 4) Sabu
- 5) Bret Hart
- 6) Ric Flair
- 7) Dean Malenko
- 8) Rey Misterio Jr.
- 9) 1-2-3 Kid
- 10) Johnny B. Badd

JW: Eddie Guerrero
BM: Eddie Guerrero
CZ: Sabu
WK: Eddie Guerrero

16. INDY MVP

- 1) Sabu
- 2) Cactus Jack
- 3) Devon Storm
- 4) Al Snow
- 5) Rick Morton

JW: Abstain
BM: Cactus Jack
CZ: Sabu
WK: Cactus Jack

17. BEST ROOKIE

- 1) The Giant
- 2) Steve Richards
- 3) Devon Storm
- 4) Chris Canyon
- 5) Jesse James Armstrong
- 6) Ahmed Johnson
- 7) Perro Aguayo Jr.
- 8) Craig Pittman
- 9) Buh Buh Ray Dudley
- 10) Paul Lauria

JW: Perro Aguayo Jr.
BM: Giant (Perro Jr., Richards)
CZ: Paul Lauria
WK: Steve Richards

18. BEST PROMOTION

- 1) ECW *
- 2) WWF
- 3) WCW
- 4) USWA
- 5) SMW

JW: UFC
BM: ECW
CZ: ECW
WK: ECW

19. NON-TV PROMOTION

- 1) NWA New Jersey
- 2) Midwest Territorial
- 3) Peach State Wrestling
- 4) Incredibly Strange Wrestling
- 5) Mid-Eastern Wrestling Fed.

JW: Abstain
BM: Incredibly Strange Wrest.
CZ: NWA New Jersey
WK: NWA New Jersey

20. PROMOTER OF THE YEAR

- 1) Vince McMahon
- 2) Paul Heyman
- 3) Tod Gordon
- 4) Eric Bischoff
- 5) Jim Cornette

JW: Bob Meyerowitz, UFC
BM: Bob Meyerowitz, UFC
CZ: Tod Gordon
WK: Bob Meyerowitz, UFC

21. ANGLE OF THE YEAR

- 1) Shawn Michaels collapses *
- 2) Bigelow shoved Taylor
- 3) Cactus turns anti-hardcore
- 4) USWA vs. SMW
- 5) Terry Funk returns to ECW
- 6) Hogan-Sting-Luger-Savage
- 7) Diesel turns hardcore
- 8) Bill Alfonso heel ref angle
- 9) Raven crucifies Dreamer
- 10) Jarrett-Roadie lip synch

JW: Michaels collapse
BM: Michaels collapse
CZ: Alfonso heel ref angle
WK: Michaels collapse

22. RISING STAR

- 1) Hunter Hearst Helmsley
- 2) Eddie Guerrero
- 3) Mikey Whipwreck
- 4) Al Snow
- 5) Johnny B. Badd

- 6) Alex Wright
- 7) Sandman
- 8) Dallas Page
- 9) Tommy Dreamer
- 10) Chris Benoit

JW: Juventud Guerrera
BM: Dean Malenko
CZ: Eddie Guerrero
WK: Eddie Guerrero

23. TAILSPIN OF THE YEAR

- 1) Shane (Dean) Douglas
- 2) Hulk Hogan
- 3) Bam Bam Bigelow
- 4) Ric Flair
- 5) Dustin (Goldust) Rhodes
- 6) Vader
- 7) Randy Savage
- 8) Steve Austin
- 9) Chris Candido
- 10) Big Bubba Rogers

JW: Randy Savage
BM: Hulk Hogan
CZ: Hulk Hogan
WK: Rick & Scott Steiner

24. BEST TV SHOW

- 1) ECW
- 2) WWF Monday Night Raw
- 3) Monday Nitro
- 4) WWF Superstars
- 5) USWA Live on WMC

JW: ECW
BM: ECW
CZ: ECW
WK: ECW

25. MOST EMBARRASSING

- 1) Goldust
- 2) Hulk Hogan
- 3) Dave Sullivan
- 4) Zodiac
- 5) Renegade
- 6) Hacksaw Duggan
- 7) Henry Godwinn
- 8) Yetti
- 9) Xanta Clause
- 10) Bob Backlund

JW: Goldust
BM: Dungeon of Doom
CZ: Goldust
WK: Dave Sullivan

26. WORST WRESTLER

- 1) Hulk Hogan

- 2) Renegade
- 3) Hacksaw Duggan
- 4) Lex Luger
- 5) Mabel
- 6) Dave Sullivan
- 7) Psycho Sid
- 8) Bertha Faye
- 9) King Kong Bundy
- 10) Zodiac

JW: Psycho Sid
BM: Max Muscle
CZ: Mabel
WK: Dave Sullivan

27. ANNOUNCING TEAM OF THE YEAR

- 1) McMahon & Lawler *
- 2) Schiavone & Heenan
- 3) Schiavone & Rhodes
- 4) Beck & Wilson & Blatnick
- 5) Bischoff & Heenan & Mongo

JW: Joey Styles & his mic
BM: Beck & Blatnick & Wilson
CZ: Joey Styles & Joey Styles
WK: Beck & Blatnick & Wilson

28. BEST INTERVIEWS

- 1) Cactus Jack *
- 2) Shawn Michaels
- 3) Ric Flair
- 4) Shane Douglas
- 5) Arn Anderson
- 6) The Public Enemy
- 7) Steve Austin
- 8) Buddy Landel
- 9) Buh Buh Ray Dudley
- 10) Bret Hart

JW: Cactus Jack
BM: Cactus Jack
CZ: Cactus Jack
WK: Cactus Jack

29. MOST UNDERUTILIZED

- 1) Al Snow (Avitar)
- 2) Body Donna Skip
- 3) Dean Douglas
- 4) Brian Pillman
- 5) Dean Malenko
- 6) Steve Austin
- 7) Chris Benoit
- 8) 1-2-3 Kid
- 9) Sabu
- 10) Eddie Guerrero

JW: Al Snow

15-44: SECONDARY CATEGORIES

BM: Mike Tenay
CZ: Al Snow
WK: Brian Pillman

30. MOST OVERPUSHED

- 1) Hulk Hogan *
- 2) Lex Luger
- 3) Dungeon of Doom
- 4) Renegade
- 5) Mabel
- 6) Ahmed Johnson
- 7) Diesel
- 8) Psycho Sid
- 9) Randy Savage
- 10) Henry Godwinn

JW: Hulk Hogan
BM: Hulk Hogan
CZ: Hulk Hogan
WK: Dungeon of Doom

31. MOST INSULTING STEREOTYPE

- 1) Goldust *
- 2) Sonny Ono
- 3) The Gangstas
- 4) Dave Sullivan
- 5) Dances with Dudley
- 6) New Japan wrestlers
- 7) Yokozuna
- 8) Men on a Mission
- 9) Henry Godwinn
- 10) Xanta Clause

JW: Goldust
BM: "Hardcore" Wrestlers
CZ: Goldust
WK: Sonny Ono

32. BEST MANEUVER

- 1) Rey Jr. top rope hurricanrana
- 2) Sabu table moonsault
- 3) Rocco Rock table moonsault
- 4) Too Cold Scorpio tumbleweed 360 legdrop
- 5) Eddy Guerrero's frog splash
- 6) Hakushi's space flying tiger press
- 7) Harlem Hangover
- 8) Vader moonsault
- 9) Chris Benoit powerbomb
- 10) Total Elimination

JW: Northern Lights
Powerbomb by Hokuto, Sasaki
BM: Too Cold's 450 splash
CZ: Rey Misterio Jr.'s over top

rope hurricanrana
WK: Guerrero's frog splash

33. WORST MANEUVER

- 1) Hogan's legdrop *
- 2) Dave Sullivan bearhug
- 3) Duggan's shoulder tackle
- 4) Renegade's dropkick
- 5) Yetti's doggy style bearhug

JW: Breaking tables, anyone
BM: Hogan's no-sell
CZ: Hogan legdrop
WK: Hogan legdrop

34. WORST MATCH

- 1) Hogan vs. Vader (3/19)
- 2) Mabel vs. Yoko (10/22)
- 3) Hogan vs. Giant (10/29)
- 4) Wippleman vs. Finkle (1/9)
- 5) Duggan vs. Kamala (7/16)
- 6) War Games (9/17)
- 7) 60 Man Battle Royal (11/26)
- 8) Dustin vs. Bully (3/19)
- 9) Douglas vs. Blanchard (1/7)
- 10) Sting & Hawk vs. Kurasawa & Meng (Clash)

JW: Hogan vs. Giant monster truck challenge
BM: Three-way tag at Beach Bash
CZ: Hogan vs. Giant, Havoc
WK: Sting & Hawk vs. Kurasawa & Meng

35. WORST PERSONALITY

- 1) Hulk Hogan
- 2) Eric Bischoff
- 3) Steve McMichael
- 4) Gene Okerlund
- 5) Zodiac

JW: Hulk Hogan
BM: Hulk Hogan
CZ: Hulk Hogan
WK: Hulk Hogan

36. WORST INTERVIEWS

- 1) Hulk Hogan *
- 2) Renegade
- 3) Alex Wright
- 4) Dave Sullivan
- 5) Alundra Blayze
- 6) Sting
- 7) Scott Steiner
- 8) Hawk
- 9) Too Cold Scorpio
- 10) Diesel

JW: Hulk Hogan
BM: Hawk
CZ: Hulk Hogan
WK: Renegade

37. FAVORITE WRESTLER

- 1) Shawn Michaels *
- 2) Ric Flair
- 3) Chris Benoit
- 4) Eddie Guerrero
- 5) Sabu
- 6) Bret Hart
- 7) Terry Funk
- 8) Vader
- 9) 1-2-3 Kid
- 10) Cactus Jack

JW: Eddie Guerrero
BM: Tod Gordon
CZ: Chris Benoit

38. LEAST FAVORITE

- 1) Hulk Hogan *
- 2) Dave Sullivan
- 3) Mabel
- 4) Jim Duggan
- 5) Goldust
- 6) Savio Vega
- 7) Mabel
- 8) Lex Luger
- 9) Henry Godwinn
- 10) Bob Holly

JW: Tommy Dreamer
BM: Hulk Hogan
CZ: Hulk Hogan

39. JAPAN TAG TEAM

- 1) Kobashi & Misawa
- 2) Chono & Tenzan
- 3) Kyoko & Takako Inoue
- 4) Kawada & Taue
- 5) Head Hunters

JW: Kyoko Inoue & Takako Inoue
BM: Misawa & Kobashi
CZ: Misawa & Kobashi
WK: Misawa & Kobashi

40. JAPAN FEUD

- 1) New Japan vs. UWFI *
- 2) Muto vs. Hashimoto
- 3) Funk vs. Cactus Jack
- 4) Aja Kong vs. Toyota
- 5) Takada vs. Muto

JW: New Japan vs. UWFI
BM: New Japan vs. UWFI
CZ: New Japan vs. UWFI

WK: New Japan vs. UWFI

41. JAPAN MATCH

- 1) Kawada & Taue vs. Misawa & Kobashi (6/9)
- 2) Toyota vs. Kyoko Inoue (5/7)
- 3) Kawada & Taue vs. Misawa & Kobashi (1/24)
- 4) Cactus Jack & Head Hunters vs. Leatherface & Shoji Nakamaki & Terry Funk (4/2)
- 5) Cactus vs. Funk (1/8)

JW: Kawada & Taue vs. Misawa & Kobashi (6/9, Budokan Hall)
BM: Kawada beats Misawa for Triple Crown
CZ: Toyota vs. Kyoko Inoue (5/7, Korakuen Hall)
WK: Kawada & Taue vs. Misawa & Kobashi (6/9)

42. BEST JAPAN PROMOTION

- 1) New Japan *
- 2) All Japan Women
- 3) All Japan
- 4) IWA
- 5) UWFI

JW: New Japan
BM: New Japan
CZ: New Japan
WK: New Japan

43. Mexican Match

- 1) Rey Jr. vs. Psicosis (10/7)
 - 2) Rey Sr. & Jr. vs. Guerreras (3/2)
 - 3) Misterio vs. Volador (7/14)
 - 4) Rey Jr. vs. Psicosis (9/22)
 - 5) Rey Jr. vs. Juventud (1/21)
- JW: Guerrero & Psicosis & Juventud Guerrero vs. Santio & Octagon & Rey Jr. (4/30)
CZ: Rey Jr. vs. Psicosis (9/22)

44. Mexican Feud

- 1) Rey Jr. vs. Psicosis *
- 2) Misterioso vs. Volador
- 3) Misterios vs. Guerreras
- 4) Konnan vs. Cien Caras
- 5) Aguayo vs. Dynamite Bros.

JW: Perro & Konnan vs. Dynamite Bros.
BM: Aguayo & Konnan vs. Dynamite Bros.
CZ: Misterios vs. Guerreras
WK: Rey Jr. vs. Psicosis

WRESTLING'S MOST INFLUENTIAL LIST OF 1995

The fourth annual "Wrestling's Most Influential List" rates wrestling's most influential people throughout the year. Someone who had power throughout the first eleven months of the year and then lost power by Dec. 31 would still be eligible for the list. Like the "Top 100 Worldwide Ratings," this list was compiled with input from over two dozen journalists, wrestlers, and promoters who closely follow the ebb and flow of the power structure of wrestling in the United States. As always the list is restricted to those who have had influence on the U.S. wrestling scene, as opposed to a worldwide perspective. If a promoter from outside the U.S. had influence in the U.S., they of course are eligible for the list.

The top 15 finishers are listed with analysis on their influence on the industry. Included along with the analysis of why they finished where they did are mitigating factors explaining reasons that held back their power during the year and a forecast of whether there are obvious signs that their influence will increase or decrease in 1996. There are also some basic facts listed on each finisher including their age and position in wrestling. Hybrid fighting is considered a full-fledged part of the pro wrestling industry.

Influence is gaged mainly on two elements: (1) how much power one wielded throughout the year in generating revenue for themselves or employees in wrestling; and (2) how much one's actions or lack of actions changed the course of the industry. One need not even necessarily be part of the industry to qualify, although reporters whose writings may have had influence do not qualify unless they also worked in the industry.

More stress is given to those who change the industry for the long term versus someone who is part of a fad or has a short string of influence that shows no sign of leaving a permanent mark on the industry. More stress is also given to someone who has influence industry-wide (i.e. UFC's Bob Meyerowitz) versus someone who has major control over an isolated segment of the industry (i.e. USWA's Randy Hales).

Following the main list, there is also a list of those who dropped off the list this year compared to last year and a review of the past three years' most influential lists.

1

TERRY BOLLEA
World Championship Wrestling

FACTS Position: Franchise wrestler, informal booker... Years in Position: 2... Age: 43... Previous Rankings ('94, '93, '92): 1, 11, 5...

ANALYSIS Throughout the year Terry Bollea ("Hulk Hogan") was the most influential man in the industry, not just on camera, but off camera. On camera, his presence was unmistakable. If he wasn't the champion, he was still the center of attention. If he wasn't getting enough attention, he'd go on TV and often do something strange, like insult "the promoter from New York" or burn a "rag sheet" or equate himself with O.J. Simpson. The words "selfless" and "Hogan" were rarely uttered together as Hogan found ways to avoid doing jobs or even selling moves when it would have helped business, all to "keep up his image." That may have had a negative influence on not only WCW, but himself, as fans seemed to catch on to his shallow on-camera persona and began booing him in most arenas. On camera, his influence grew compared to last year for two reasons. One, he was in WCW the entire year, not just half the year. Two, with the inception of Monday Nitro he began making almost weekly live appearances on television.

Off camera, if anything, his power grew from last year. He usurped booking power and began overruling Kevin Sullivan and the booking committee. When it came time for a major storyline decision to be made, it could not be made without Bollea's approval. He wasn't involved in a lot of the less glamorous day to day progressions WCW made during the year, but his name value and presence on and off camera make him number one on this list.

MITIGATING FACTOR His effects on buyrates diminished during the year and his presence on a show did not noticeably translate into higher TV ratings anymore bringing into question whether he deserves the power and influence he wields...

FORECAST Likely has at least one more year in him of doing exactly what he did in 1995...

2

ERIC BISCHOFF
World Championship Wrestling

FACTS Position: Senior vice president... Years in Position: 3... Age: 40... Previous Rankings: 3, 2, —...

ANALYSIS Without Hulk Hogan, it's doubtful WCW would have ever gained the confidence necessary to launch Monday Nitro. But it's doubtful many V.P.'s would have the fortitude to challenge head-up the perennial number one promotion. With honorable mention to Ted Turner and Bischoff's boss Harvey Schiller, the decision to go head-to-head Monday nights changed the course of the wrestling industry.

Behind the scenes, Bischoff orchestrated a major money deal with New Japan that led by the end of the year to an exclusive working agreement where New Japan only uses foreign talent from WCW. Meanwhile, WCW gave several New Japan wrestlers a considerable push including building Starrcade's undercard around them.

Bischoff's brash on-air style elevated the Monday night wars to a level that was obvious not only to insiders, but also to average wrestling viewers.

Behind the scenes Bischoff was considered a real leader in the front office heading up improvements in several unglamorous areas of WCW including syndication, video sales, and licensing revenues.

With Turner's money behind him, Bischoff is the most powerful executive in wrestling. He finishes ahead of McMahon because not only did Bischoff force more changes on the landscape of the industry in 1995 than McMahon did, but he is in a better position to continue to make changes thanks to Turner's deep pockets.

MITIGATING FACTOR He shared power with Bollea and does have to answer to Turner superiors, which McMahon doesn't...

FORECAST He signed an extension on his contract. His approval ratings within TBS appears to be high. Could become no. 1 in 1996...

3**VINCE MCMAHON**
World Wrestling Federation

FACTS Position: President/Owner of Titan Sports... Years in Position: 13... Age: 50... Previous Rankings: 2, 1, 1...

ANALYSIS After building the WWF into the number one promotion nationally, he faced no real competition until 1994. Throughout 1995, thanks to Ted Turner's money, Hulk Hogan's name value, and Eric Bischoff's aggressiveness, he found his WWF in a financially shaky position and no longer as feared within the industry.

If Bischoff and Bollea together share 95 percent of the influence in WCW, McMahon alone is 95 percent of the WWF's power. But that is not enough, given the limited resources of the WWF, to make him the kingpin of the industry throughout 1996. While Bischoff changed the industry, and while Hogan gave WCW the name value they needed to be taken seriously in the corporate environment, McMahon merely worked to reverse a weakening WWF foundation.

MITIGATING FACTOR There is no question that he deserves a top three position, and it is debatable whether he should be higher. The dropoff between the top three and the rest is great.

FORECAST It appeared at the end of 1995 that the WWF could be in trouble, but things looked up in early '96. McMahon could finish back at one or two with a successful year...

4**PAUL HEYMAN**
Extreme Champ. Wrestling

FACTS Position: Owner/Promoter/Booker... Years in Position: 2... Age: 30... Previous Rankings: 5, 10, —...

ANALYSIS At the forefront of progressive, innovative booking and promoting concepts, he took chances no one else would have taken even if they had thought of them. Everything from small television production techniques to entire booking concepts (such as blurring the lines between heels and babyfaces) were replicated in the U.S., Mexico, and Japan promotions.

Although ECW founder Tod Gordon still has his hand in ECW's day-to-day operations, the primary idea man and propeller of that which gives ECW its international attention is Heyman.

The return of blood, the Uncensored WCW pay-per-view concept, and the more adult-oriented approach of the big two is without question borne out of ECW's influence.

MITIGATING FACTORS The fact remains the revenue generated by ECW annually is relatively minuscule compared to the big two in the U.S. His creative side isn't questioned, but his administrative skills are and it may take more delegating in the future for ECW to blossom on a national scale. ECW still has limited exposure...

FORECAST Should close the gap between 3 and 4 on this list during 1996...

5**SHAWN MICHAELS THE CLIQUE**
World Wrestling Federation

FACTS Position: Wrestler... Age: 30... Previous Rankings: 11, —, —...

ANALYSIS The vocal and brash duo of Shawn Michaels and Kevin Nash (Diesel) with a supporting cast of Scott Hall (Razor Ramon), Sean Waltman (1-2-3 Kid), and Hunter Hearst Helmsley were known as "The Clique." Michaels and Diesel, in closed sessions with McMahon, pushed the 50 year old promoter into taking a more hip, more adult-oriented approach to his promotion which showed up throughout the year.

While other top wrestlers in the past have just looked out for themselves (Hogan, Ultimate Warrior) or kept mostly to themselves (Bret Hart), Michaels along with Nash pushed and prodded the direction of the WWF.

On an individual, on-camera basis, Michaels clearly established himself as the true future franchise of the WWF, especially since Diesel's run on top never took off. Collectively The Clique consisted of so much power in terms of their positions on cards, they flexed those muscles and weren't always popular with other wrestlers.

MITIGATING FACTORS They held no formal positions other than that of wrestlers...

FORECAST Michaels could pull away from The Clique and become the clear number two power in the WWF if early '96 is any indication.

7**KEVIN SULLIVAN**
World Championship Wrestling

FACTS Position: Head booker... Years in Position: Less than 1... Age: 47... Previous Rankings: —...

ANALYSIS Normally being head booker in the number two company in the country would place you higher than position 7 (for instance, Ric Flair as WCW booker last year placed 4th), but Sullivan was booker for only the last half of the year and not only shared duties with a committee but was actually second in the booking department behind Hogan.

That said, Sullivan put his personal stamp on the direction of WCW. He was responsible for setting up the Dungeon of Doom as the lead group of heels. Fresh from a run in ECW, he showed he was influenced by Heyman. He pushed for the concept of matching faces against faces and pushed for the hirings of ECW's Eddie Guerrero, Chris Benoit, and Dean Malenko.

Largely unheralded and probably under-appreciated, he deserves credit for lasting over six months without any cries for him to be replaced, plus, he headed increasing TV ratings.

MITIGATING FACTORS His Dungeon of Doom concept was far from compelling and he deserves part of the blame for zingers like the Halloween Havoc monster truck debacle...

FORECAST Likely more of the same in '96...

8**KEN SHAMROCK**
Ultimate Fight Championships

FACTS Position: Fighter... Years in Position: 2... Age: 33... Previous Rankings: —...

ANALYSIS For pro wrestling fans, Ken Shamrock in tandem with Dan Severn, provided a full-fledged U.S. link between UFC hybrid fighting and traditional worked pro wrestling. Shamrock, more than Severn, has been a spokesperson for UFC. He effectively defended UFC on Larry King Live and came across as a mainstream sports superstar rather than a fringe, unhinged, tough man competitor.

His involvement in Pancrase in Japan, a more restricted version of hybrid fighting that is part work and part shoot, led in 1995 to Semaphore Entertainment Group (parent company of UFC) deciding to air Pancrase on pay-per-view in the U.S., opening the doors to another Japanese wrestling group other than New Japan being carried on pay-per-view in the U.S.

Financially, his matches against Royce Gracie and Dan Severn drew stronger buyrates than any event Hogan was on all year and his match against Taktarov was in the range of Hogan's best buyrate. That's without seven hours of free television hype watched by millions...

MITIGATING FACTORS UFC might not skip a beat without him... Has yet to beat Gracie...

FORECAST Should remain top draw in '96.

9**JIMMY HART**
World Championship Wrestling

FACTS Position: Terry Bollea's personal manager... Years in Position: 2... Age: 54... Previous Rankings: 7, —, —...

ANALYSIS Even though his character turned heel on Hulk Hogan on the air, his major influence was behind the scenes. He is Bollea's closest confidant from a business perspective. He has more access to Bollea than anyone and some close to Hart say he has a lot more to do with what Bollea does and doesn't do on the air than anyone realizes. He also acts as a liaison between Bollea and WCW. He insulated Bollea from criticism, which may be a bad thing, and keeps necessary relationships on solid ground due to his anxious, energetic, yet easy going manner. As a personal manager for Bollea he helped set up Hogan's mainstream exposure and revenues.

MITIGATING FACTORS Some argue Hart is merely a yes-man for Hogan and being second in command to a major player doesn't make him a player. Doesn't hold a formal executive position in WCW and his on-air role, while bigger in 1995 than 1994, is still not vital in any way to WCW's survival or viability in its battle against the WWF.

FORECAST As long as he remains close to Bollea and Bollea remains among the three most influential men in the industry, Hart will reserve a top ten position...

6

BOB MEYEROWITZ/UFC
Ultimate Fight Championships

FACTS Position: President of Semaphore Entertainment Group... Years Promoting UFC: 2... Age: ... Previous Rankings: —...

ANALYSIS Is UFC "real pro wrestling" or a totally separate sport? That debate aside, the influence of UFC on pro wrestling has been great the last two years and will continue. UFC would be even more influential if wrestling promoters knew how to take advantage of UFC's influence. For instance, UFC has exposed to its followers that the size and strength of a fighter is secondary to skill and stand up skills largely secondary to mat skills. Traditional pro wrestling fans make up a big portion of hybrid fighting's audience.

Arguably, the success and popularity of Shawn Michaels and Eddie Guerrero, among other smaller wrestlers, could be partially attributed to UFC shattering the myth that big beats small.

UFC's main industry influence came in the to pay-per-view category. Their average buyrates beat most WWF and WCW buyrates all year and it appeared they had momentum on their side.

MITIGATING FACTORS Meyerowitz is second to UFC as a concept when it comes to overall influence on the industry...

FORECAST UFC and Meyerowitz will remain no. 1 in hybrid fighting and their influence on the wrestling industry should reach new heights...

10

SABU
Independent Wrestler

FACTS Position: Independent wrestler... Years in Position: 12... Age: 31... Previous Rankings: —...

ANALYSIS Just missed the top 15 last year. It became clear in 1995 that there was some longevity to the influence he has had on the in-ring style in America and globally. He was ECW's top wrestler early in the year, a stand out performer on a strong roster. When he was fired from ECW, ECW got by without him due to a deep roster. He was brought in by WCW as a featured newcomer on their second Nitro.

More than anything, his influence worldwide has been in terms of his in-ring style. Wrestlers not just in ECW, but throughout the U.S. independent scenes and many in Japan have copied his table breaking, all-out-assault, reckless flying style. Had he been more of a politician and more compromising, he may have contributed more to chipping away at the "big men are tougher" or "only big men draw" myths.

MITIGATING FACTORS Not compatible with the industry's protocol as he failed to establish himself in either WCW or New Japan. The weaknesses of his style were exposed in many of his New Japan matches. A specialty performer.

FORECAST Rey Misterio Jr. could replace Sabu as most influential of worldwide style...

11-15

JIM ROSS... BRUCE PRICHARD... RANDY HALES...
RIC FLAIR... KONNAN...

11 and 12/Jim Ross & Bruce Prichard (WWF assistant bookers; Ages Ross 44, Prichard 33; Previous Rankings: Ross: —, —, 6; Prichard: Unranked). Together they slowly took over behind the scenes office duties previously reserved for Pat Patterson, who slowly pulled out of his involvement as his November retirement approached. Patterson didn't make this year's list because he was not an agent of change in the WWF whereas Ross and Prichard have received some of the credit for the changes, both good and bad, in the WWF's approach. No one will probably ever approach the power Patterson had in the WWF considering how long he had worked with McMahon, and even that influence was small compared to the hands-on McMahon. That said, these were the two people in the creative department of the WWF who had McMahon's ear more than anyone all year...

13/Randy Hales (USWA booker; Age: 34; Previous Rankings: Unranked). There are probably few people left in the industry who possess the background, ability, and desire to book an old-style territory, the last remaining of which is the USWA. Due to family connections, Hales grew up in the USWA territory and learned the tricks of the trade. After helping behind the scenes for years, he finally was given a chance to book. In the past owners Jerry Jarrett and Jerry Lawler along with Bill Dundee and Eddie Gilbert had been rotated as bookers. While not having phenomenal success in his job, he sure held the territory together at a time when a similar promotion, SMW, was going out of business. The USWA, as has been the case the last 15 years, had ups and downs during the year, but Hales's booking compares favorably to that of his predecessors. He kept the live Memphis TV flavor alive, both the good and the bad. Lance Russell hosting the show all year helped keep the

unique Memphis flavor alive. Being a new face, it's disappointing Hales didn't break the mold of past bookers and actually create a new star or two. Jesse James Armstrong had the potential but not the right push and Doug Gilbert was at one point ready to break out as a drawing card and at that point his push was squashed apparently in order to protect the establishment of Lawler, Christopher, and Jarrett. He did succeed in the further development of the undersized PG13 as arguably the territory's top draw. Hales's influence wasn't progressive in the sense that it permeated the industry, but keeping a territory alive is in and of itself a benefit to the industry...

14/Ric Flair (Position: Booker early in the year, top wrestler later in the year; Age: 46; Previous Rankings: 4, 6, 4). Flair began the year as booker of WCW, but lost a power struggle with Hulk Hogan and was replaced by Kevin Sullivan. Flair's influence was shown through his ability to charismatically draw TV ratings and help draw solid pay-per-view buyrates. His presence was enough of a threat to keep Hogan in check (in the sense that management could fall back on Flair were they to get into a standoff with Hogan). As booker, he didn't break any new ground or set new trends...

15/ Konnan (AAA headliner and promoter, WCW wrestler; Age: 31; Previous Rankings: Unranked). Besides his decreased but still impressive gates as a headliner in L.A. in 1995, he was instrumental in getting Rey Misterio Jr. and Psicosis to ECW at a time when ECW needed to fill a gap left by Eddie Guerrero and Dean Malenko. That led to interest by WCW in both Rey Jr. and Psicosis. Konnan reestablished a key link that led to more talks between WCW and AAA. Should have had a greater influence in ECW and as part of what was a strangely missing run by AAA on pay-per-view in the U.S...

NOTEBOOK

PREVIOUS RANKINGS 1992: Vince McMahon, Bill Watts, Pat Patterson, Ric Flair, Terry Bollea, Jim Ross, Dave Meltzer, Jim Cornette, Dusty Rhodes, and Jerry Jarrett...

1993: Vince McMahon, Eric Bischoff, Pat Patterson, Jerry Jarrett, Jim Cornette, Ric Flair, Dusty Rhodes, Dave Meltzer, Antonio Pena, Paul Heyman, Tod Gordon, Terry Bollea, Linda McMahon, Vader, Ron Skoler, Jim Crockett...

1994: Terry Bollea, Vince McMahon, Eric Bischoff, Ric Flair, Paul Heyman, Pat Patterson, Jimmy Hart, Antonio Pena, Jim Cornette, Jerry Lawler, Ron Skoler, Linda McMahon, Tod Gordon, Shawn Michaels, Royce Gracie...

DROP-OFFS By the end of the year Patterson was no longer active in the business and during the year took a more laid back approach and wasn't instrumental in any changes in the

industry... Antonio Pena seemed on the verge of becoming a major force in the U.S. wrestling scene, but problems in his home country distracted him from any further progress in the U.S. market... Jim Cornette struggled unsuccessfully to keep his SMW promotion alive, but the disappearance of SMW didn't even have a noticeable ripple effect on the industry. Should be a top ten player next year given his early 1996 WWF role... Jerry Lawler more than ever was just a color commentator in the WWF and a going-through-the-motions headliner in Memphis... Ron Skoler unlike in '94 didn't promote any hugely successful U.S. shows nor was he involved in a pay-per-view... Tod Gordon just missed making the list, but remains an important behind the scenes staple in ECW... Royce Gracie was inactive in 1995...

TOP 100

1995 WORLDWIDE RATINGS

1 Mitsuharu Misawa (5/7/16)	All Japan	51 Naoki Sano (-/100/37)	UWFI/NJ
2 Toshiaki Kawada (1/2/5)	All Japan	52 Super Calo (-/-/-)	AAA
3 Kenta Kobashi (2/1/1)	All Japan	53 British Bulldog (-/-/82)	WWF
4 Chris Benoit (3/6/4)	WCW/NJ	54 David Finlay (61/62/-)	WCW
5 Great Sasuke (6/26/30)	New Japan	55 Ultimo Dragon (39/29/19)	EMLL/WAR
6 Shawn Michaels (8/9/8)	WWF	56 Chris Jericho (86/77/-)	WAR
7 Eddie Guerrero (12/16/38)	WCW/NJ	57 Hakushi (57/-/-)	WWF
8 Rey Misterio Jr. (15/37/-)	AAA/ECW	58 Johnny B. Badd (83/-/-)	WCW
9 Psicosis (11/22/-)	AAA/ECW	59 Miguel Perez Jr. (-/-/-)	EMLL/IWA
10 Juventud Guerrera (43/-/-)	AAA	60 Pentagon (-/-/-)	AAA
11 Bret Hart (14/10/12)	WWF	61 Doug Furnas (50/49/58)	All Japan
12 Shinjiro Otani (21/91/-)	New Japan	62 Stan Hansen (17/8/25)	All Japan
13 Shiro Koshinaka (36/79/-)	New Japan	63 Wolfie D (-/-/-)	USWA
14 Negro Casas (13/14/10)	EMLL	64 Tommy Rogers (82/63/70)	All Japan
15 Dean Malenko (65/46/-)	WCW/NJ	65 Bam Bam Bigelow (88/98/51)	Indy
16 Shinya Hashimoto (37/-/-)	New Japan	66 Mikey Whipwreck (-/-/-)	ECW
17 El Hijo del Santo (20/33/35)	EMLL	67 Hiroyoshi Tenzan (-/-/-)	New Japan
18 Keiji Muto (27/18/13)	New Japan	68 Gran Naniwa (-/-/-)	EMLL
19 Jun Akiyama (30/32/-)	All Japan	69 Takao Omori (63/-/-)	All Japan
20 Dan Kroffat (23/13/18)	All Japan	70 Heavy Metal Casas (41/15/-)	AAA
21 Owen Hart (38/54/68)	WWF	71 Lord Steven Regal (75/66/-)	WCW
22 1-2-3 Kid (28/27/29)	WWF	72 Marabunta (-/-/-)	AAA
23 La Parka (22/65/-)	AAA	73 Rob Van Dam (97/-/-)	AJ/ECW
24 Jushin Liger (9/4/2)	New Japan	74 Shiryu (62/-/-)	Michinoku
25 Nobuhiko Takada (18/24/56)	UWFI/NJ	75 Volador (-/-/-)	AAA
26 Sabu (7/12/42)	ECW	76 Sato (-/-/-)	Michinoku
27 El Samurai (19/25/43)	New Japan	77 Angel Mortal (-/-/-)	AAA
28 Silver King (40/68/82)	EMLL/IWA	78 El Felino (79/-/-)	AAA
29 Cactus Jack (25/36/32)	ECW/IWA	79 Scott Steiner (54/67/44)	Indy
30 Vader (16/5/11)	WWF	80 Tracy Smothers (64/31/75)	USWA
31 Ric Flair (31/11/7)	WCW	81 Kiyoshi Tamura (-/-/-)	UWFI/NJ
32 Fuerza Guerrera (33/72/46)	EMLL	82 Terry Funk (35/31/50)	IWA
33 Taka Michinoku (67/-/-)	Michinoku	83 Bobby Eaton (91/50/26)	All Japan
34 Blue Panther (26/41/-)	EMLL	84 Satoru Asako (-/-/-)	All Japan
35 Masa Chono (29/20/15)	New Japan	85 Yoshinari Ogawa (58/35/40)	All Japan
36 Koji Kanemoto (-/-/-)	New Japan	86 Alex Wright (-/-/-)	WCW
37 Super Delphin (24/43/-)	Michinoku	87 Shane Douglas (45/47/48)	ECW
38 Hayabusa (52/-/-)	IWA	88 Flyboy Rocco Rock (44/97/-)	WCW
39 Al Snow (48/-/-)	WWF/Indy	89 Hunter Helmsley (100/-/-)	WWF
40 Too Cold Scorpio (46/53/-)	ECW	90 Mr. Condor (-/-/-)	AAA
41 Akira Taue (34/39/-)	All Japan	91 Volk Han (-/-/-)	Rings
42 Jeff Jarrett (-/82/60)	WWF/USWA	92 Head Hunter B (-/-/-)	IWA
43 Arn Anderson (84/22/42)	WCW	93 Perro Aguayo Jr. (-/-/-)	AAA
44 Razor Ramon (55/-/-)	WWF	94 Brian Christopher (76/73/-)	USWA
45 Brian Pillman (59/19/14)	WCW	95 Diamond Dallas Page (-/-/-)	WCW
46 Body Donna Skip (42/51/-)	WWF	96 Masahito Kakihara (-/-/-)	UWFI/NJ
47 Takayuki Iizuka (70/48/67)	New Japan	97 Akira Nogami (-/57/49)	New Japan
48 Kensuke Sasaki (71/64/17)	New Japan	98 Yoshinari Yamamoto (-/-/-)	Rings
49 Johnny Ace (90/-/100)	All Japan	99 Gedo (-/-/-)	WAR
50 Jerry Estrada (53/74/55)	AAA	100 Brad Armstrong (-/70/36)	WCW

SUMMARY OF CRITERIA

Pro Wrestling Torch's "Top 100 WorldWide Ratings" is compiled with input from over two dozen international tape viewers, professional wrestlers, and promoters. The rankings are meant to be reflective of workrate during the year 1995, with workrate being a combination of in-ring skills (athletic ability, ring psychology, selling ability) and work ethic (including consistency). A wrestler who wrestles during the year but at year's end is not active due to retirement, death, long-term injury, or a hiatus is not eligible for the list, although one need not be active full time throughout the entire year to be eligible.

Although workrate isn't based on whether a wrestler is pushed by the promotion he works for, a pushed wrestler does usually have more opportunity to show off skill and a consistently high work ethic. Charisma does tend to get factored in as a positive, although the vast majority of the criteria goes to workrate. These ratings over the years do tend to favor, all other things being equal, a wrestler with an innovative and progressive ring style over those whose repertoire of moves tends to draw on less innovative examples from the past. Strength, legitimate toughness, and size are not factors in these ratings (i.e. in comparing Vader to Misterio Jr.), although those classified as "midgets" or "minis" are not ranked, if only for the same reason that women aren't ranked—because they wrestle mainly among themselves and not against wrestlers in other classifications.

These rankings do not reflect a wrestler's ability to draw fans to an arena (which combines workrate with a heavy dose of charisma, interview skills, gimmick, etc.), therefore many who work within the business see these ratings as somewhat insignificant to the big picture. Nevertheless, within the industry there is a pride, especially among the wrestlers who rank high in this poll, to out-work and out-innovate and out-dazzle their fellow wrestlers. These rankings reflect those who succeeded in 1995 at doing just that.

While these ratings are subjective, the sampling of votes is diverse enough that many points of view are represented, including input from wrestlers who have first-hand working knowledge of strengths and weaknesses of various wrestlers in this poll. There is a much greater agreement among those polled regarding who belongs in the top quadrant as opposed to who belongs in the third and the fourth quadrants, especially when comparing various positions in those quadrants.

*****In parenthesis next to each ranked wrestler is where they ranked the last two years ('94/'93/'92). To the right of each name is their promotional affiliation as of Dec. 31, 1995.**

RATINGS ANALYSIS

PROMOTIONAL BREAK-DOWN

(1) **Mitsuharu Misawa** played his role as the top wrestler in All Japan to perfection. He was comfortable with his position and secure enough to help others look good. This was easily his best year in the ring as a top wrestler... (2) **Toshiaki Kawada**, ranked number one last year, continued to be a standard of excellence and finished a very close second to Misawa in the polls with several picking Kawada ahead of Misawa... (3) **Kenta Kobashi** was clearly the best in the world in 1993 and has improved since then, but he hasn't improved at the same rate as nos. 1 and 2. Kobashi was cited as being below Misawa and Kawada this year partially because he doesn't seem comfortable yet with his role as a veteran. He still plays up the young, underdog babyface routine more than is justified at this point. Kobashi is far more theatrical in his selling than Misawa or Kawada, but that doesn't necessarily fit as well with the direction of All Japan's in-ring style. That takes nothing away from Kobashi, who at 28 has been among the best three workers for the last four years. In comparison, Flair didn't become recognized as a great worker at that level until he was 30...

(4) **Chris Benoit** is adept at wrestling so many styles internationally due to hands on experience that he wouldn't find himself out of place in any ring anywhere in the world. That said, 1995 was the first year he received a legitimate main event push anywhere, that being in ECW and sort of in WCW later in the year. He is on pace to become one of the best junior heavyweight of all time. His lack of charisma and ability to tell a story in the ring outside of the pure athletics of a match may hold him back from drawing money akin to his actual in-ring skills... (5) **Great Sasuke** was rated no. 6 last year ahead of no. 7 Sabu. In 1995, Sasuke not only continued being perhaps the most spectacular flyer in Japan, but grew to be a consistently great all-around worker. Sabu, meanwhile, showed he is on a different path that most people responding to the poll saw as being more a specialty style and not an all-around worker compatible with the best in the industry...

(6) **Shawn Michaels** had great matches against a variety of opponents. Jeff Jarrett has had limited exposure to a variety of styles and Michaels carried him to a great singles match. He took the ladder match concept to a new level with arguably a better sequel to his original against Ramon. Because of his charisma and selling ability, he was able to make a match against Sid interesting. He can carry not only a match storyline, but can get across a larger issue unlike anyone else in the business such as his convincing collapse against Owen Hart. It will be a telling test to see if given a top spot in 1996 and a chance to show off against a better all-around worker in Bret Hart if he will move into a top five position by next year's poll... (7) **Eddie Guerrero** was less consistent than those rated above him not due to

effort, which was as good as anyone rated above him, but to his compatibility to opponents of differing styles or inferior skills. Guerrero is a world class wrestler who will remain there for years to come. His work in WCW in 1996 against inferior opponents should improve his ability to carry a match...

(8) **Rey Misterio Jr.** in 1995 continued to revolutionize the aerial aspect of the sport and has taken that element of wrestling to a new plateau which will be the basis on which all other fliers are judged... (9) **Psicosis** stayed in the same spot in the poll as last year, although certainly improved his game considerably. The weaker elements of his style compared to the top five are selling and psychology. In 1995 he added to his offense and developed a strong ring persona. While Konnan had trouble making the transition from lucha style six-man tags to singles matches in the U.S. in 1995, Psicosis did develop that element, increasing his overall ability. In 1995, thanks to more singles matches including his phenomenal series with Rey Misterio Jr. in ECW, he showed he was an all-around worker... (10) **Juventud Guerrera** debuted last year as a rookie at no. 43 and jumped into the top ten this year. As a pupil of sorts to the more experienced Rey Jr. and Psicosis (boy, doesn't that sound strange given their ages), he has learned fast, but some already had him rated above Rey Jr. and Psicosis. Juventud shows the ability and is improving at a rate where he could become the best lucha libre style wrestler in the world next year even if Rey Jr. and Psicosis continue to improve at their current rates...

Departures Hiro Hase (4th in '94, retired), Steve Williams (10, hiatus), Steve Austin (32, injury filled and disappointing in-ring year), Tsoyoshi Kikuchi (47), El Dandy (49), Emilio Charles Jr. (51), Sting (56), Jimmy Del Rey (60), Octagon (66), Masakatsu Funaki (68), Taz (69, injured most of year), Rick Morton (72), Johnny Smith (74), Bestia Salvaje (77), El Texano (78), Dustin Rhodes (80), Johnny Grunge (81), Steve Armstrong (85), Rick Steiner (87), Fatu (89), Perro Aguayo (93), Gary Albright (94), Doug Gilbert (95), Riki Choshu (96), Mike Enos (98), Dirty White Boy (99).

Notebook The highest debut comes from Koji Kanemoto at no. 36 followed by Super Calo at 52... The highest U.S. wrestler debut on this year's list is Mikey Whipwreck at 66 who has turned into a good, niche worker in ECW... Biggest drop by a first quadrant finisher in 1994 is Stan Hansen, who finished no. 62 this year. Age caught up with him... Vader, Super Delphin, Cactus Jack, El Samurai, and Sabu drop from the first quadrant last year to the second quadrant this year... Dean Malenko took the biggest jump of anyone into the first quadrant, from 65 to 15 thanks to finally getting a showcase series against Eddie Guerrero in the U.S....

The following are promotional and national breakdowns of the Top 100 Rankings on the previous page. In the U.S. promotional breakdowns the ratings go beyond those who made the Top 100 list. The ratings are based on the respective promotions' rosters as of January 1995. In parenthesis is where each wrestler finished in the Worldwide Top 100 Ratings...

All Japan Top 10: Mitsuharu Misawa (1), Toshiaki Kawada (2), Kenta Kobashi (3), Jun Akiyama (19), Dan Kroffat (20), Akira Taue (41), Johnny Ace (49), Doug Furnas (61), Stan Hansen (62), Tommy Rogers (64).

New Japan Top 10: Great Sasuke (5), Shinjiro Otani (12), Shiro Koshinaka (13), Dean Malenko (15), Shinya Hashimoto (16), Keiji Muto (18), Jushin Liger (24), Nobuhiko Takada (25), El Samurai (27), Masa Chono (35).

Mexico Top 10: Rey Misterio Jr. (8), Psicosis (9), Juventud Guerrera (10), Negro Casas (14), El Hijo del Santo (17), La Parka (23), Silver King (28), Fuerza Guerrera (32), Blue Panther (34), Jerry Estrada (50)

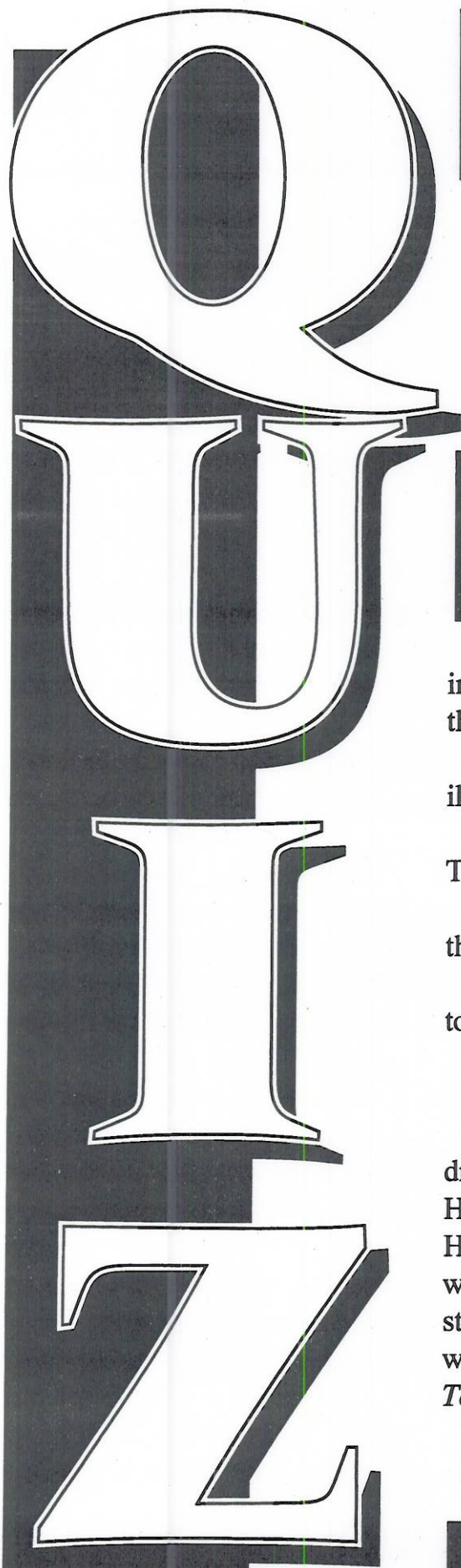
WWF Top 20: Shawn Michaels (6), Bret Hart (11), Owen Hart (21), 1-2-3 Kid (22), Vader (30), Al Snow (39), Jeff Jarrett (42), Razor Ramon (43), Body Donna Skip (46), British Bulldog (53), Hakushi (57), Hunter Hearst Helmsley (89), Rad Radford, Fatu, Savio Vega, Bob Holly, Flip (Tom Prichard), Barry Horowitz, Henry Godwinn, Billy Gunn.

WCW Top 20: Chris Benoit (4), Eddie Guerrero (7), Dean Malenko (15), Ric Flair (31), Arn Anderson (43), Brian Pillman (45), "Belfast Bruiser" David Finlay (54), Johnny B. Badd (58), Lord Steven Regal (71), Bobby Eaton (83), Alex Wright (86), Flyboy Rocco Rock (88), Diamond Dallas Page (95), Brad Armstrong (100), Konnan, Sting, Chris Kanyon, Marcus Bagwell, Mark Starr, Randy Savage.

USWA Top 10: Wolfie D (68), Tracy Smothers (80), Brian Christopher (94), J.C. Ice, Jesse James Armstrong, Doug Gilbert, Jerry Lawler, Rick Morton, Tex Slazenger, Tommy Rich.

ECW Top 10: Rey Misterio Jr. (8), Psicosis (9), Sabu (26), Cactus Jack (29), Too Cold Scorpio (40), Mikey Whipwreck (66), Rob Van Dam (73), Shane Douglas (87), Steve Richards, Taz.

The following is a list of the number of wrestlers each major promotion had representing them in the Top 100 Ratings: All Japan (15), New Japan (20), AAA (14), EMLL (8), WWF (12), WCW (14), ECW (7), USWA (3)...



BRUCE MITCHELL'S

**NOW
SUPER-SIZED!**

FIFTH ANNUAL

YEAR-IN-REVIEW

"Tradition? What tradition? It's just an excuse for you to get in a bunch of cheap shots you couldn't put in the *Torch* during the year."

—(Soon to be ex-) traditional *Torch* Year-In-Review Quiz illustrator John Hitchcock.

The Holidays.

A time for family and friends to get together, to reflect on the year past, and to just enjoy each other's company.

A time for everyone, *Torch* readers and non-readers alike, to rest, recharge, and reflect on the meaning of the season.

Everyone, that is, but me.

I don't get to enjoy the holiday season like everyone else.

No, I have to start trying to figure out whether a wildly drunk Captain Kirk appeared on Raw in '94 or '95, whether Herb Abrams bounced any checks last year, which crony of Hulk Hogan or Dusty Rhodes took a bunny rabbit to the ring, which pumpkin-headed promoter tried to act like he was the star instead of the wrestlers, and how close I can get to saying what Hulk and Lex were up to this year without getting the *Torch* sued.

The pressure is enormous.

Instead of watching bowl games, I have to spend time leafing

Illustrated by John Hitchcock

through old *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* (Why doesn't Movieline cover wrestling, for chrissakes?) looking for silly names and deservedly forgotten pay-per-view results. Instead of eating turkey with my family I have to try to decipher Dave (Editor? Who needs an editor?) Meltzer's unique way with a sentence to figure out whether Ron Skolar is still a promoter or not.

And I'm still looking for that issue of the *Torch* where Wade explained the failure of Wrestlemania to draw a decent buyrate.

It's not like anyone appreciates the effort and sacrifice I put myself through, either.

To the contrary.

I get to spend the rest of the year hearing from creepy, obsessive fans who feel I don't respect them or their favorites. (Now, why would they think that?) Or seeing that insecure, jock-sniffing promoter pout to his wrestler buddy that I "never called him." (Why should I?) Or fielding constant phone calls from WCW Hotline shill Mark Madden asking whether he made the quiz this year. (No.)

Or reading inadvertently hilarious defenses of items in previous quizzes (like the goof last year who claimed it wasn't his fault that the bloody clips on his cable access show were so offensive because, after all, how should he know that the "Philadelphia" soundtrack had songs about AIDS on it?).

Or that traditional favorite—watching fanboys goad Jim Cornette into making threats against Wade and me on the SMW Fan Week tape. (Not exactly a hard task, but where will the poor saps go this year?)

Then there's the sharp-eyed readers who write, not to praise my creativity, but to point out that the answer key didn't match the questions again last year. (Actually, they're right...)

Then Monday Night Raw and Nitro steal my gimmick and start making malicious fun of each other, making my annual effort all but superfluous.

But all of the drudgery, sacrifice (none of my family gave me any presents again this year), irritation, and hard feelings have to be put to the side.

Because like the holidays themselves, dreary and depressing as they also are, the Year-In-Review Wrestling Quiz questions are now a tradition.

And tradition must be served.

There are no prizes offered for correct answers this year. As a professional educator I recognize that knowledge is its own reward. Not to mention the fact that an answer key is provided you lazy mopes...

Please read the questions silently to yourself as I read them aloud. No fair looking on Paulie's paper, Tod.

(1) Meeting of the Greats Dept.: Famous WWF superstar Jerry "The King" Lawler introduced himself to Ted Turner at a World Series game this year. How did Billionaire Ted reply to Lawler's gracious gesture?

A. "King of Memphis, right? I always loved it when you pulled down your shoulder strap."

B. "Jerry Lawler? Yeah, I used to watch you when I was a kid."

C. "I know you. You're the one with the corny jokes."

D. "One of my 'rasslers, huh? You're not cutting your forehead with a razor out there are you? We've gotta stop that, you know."

(2) Special Song Lyric Category Part I: Who "does this, he does that, he's mean as a snake and quick as a cat"?

A. A Man called Sting.

B. A Man called Shaft.

C. A Cat called Garfield.

(3) Special Song Lyric Category Part II: "Who's the cat that won't back down, when there's danger all around"?

A. A Man called Sting.

B. A Man called Shaft.

C. A Cat called Garfield.

(4) Possibly Gay Part II: Pick the one performer who did not appear in drag this year?

A. Dustin Rhodes

B. Miss Texas

C. Ric Flair

D. Kevin Sullivan

E. Sherri Martel

(5) How many people were actually at the Bash at the Beach pay-per-view that WCW claimed had a record crowd of 100,000 fans?

A. Oh, lots and lots.

B. One fan per beer bottle thrown at the ring.

C. Five fans for every one fan actually watching the matches.

D. Less than ten thousand.

(6) The Easiest Question in the Five Year History of this Quiz: Which of the following WCW personnel were NOT fired for slicing their foreheads open with a razor?

A. Blacktop Bully

B. Dustin Rhodes

C. Mike Graham

D. Hulk Hogan



(7) Last Gasp Dept: Pick the one person who was not a member of Buddy Landel's Militia in Smoky Mountain Wrestling:

A. A retired midget.

B. A retired no-show who used to cut his arm open with an ax.

C. Some biker-type with a raccoon pelt on his back.

D. A real wrestler.

(8) Which of the following teases that Gene "I Can't Talk About It On The Air" Okerlund used to lure gullible callers to the WCW Hotline actually had a "yes" answer?

A. Are Randy Savage and Elizabeth back together? (used several times).

B. Is the Ultimate Warrior coming to WCW? (used several times)

C. Is the Ultimate Warrior coming to the WWF? (used several times)

D. Did a mid-'40s ex-world champion (i.e. Ric Flair) die? (would have used several times but TBS threatened to fire him)

E. Is yet another WCW pay-per-view show coming up?

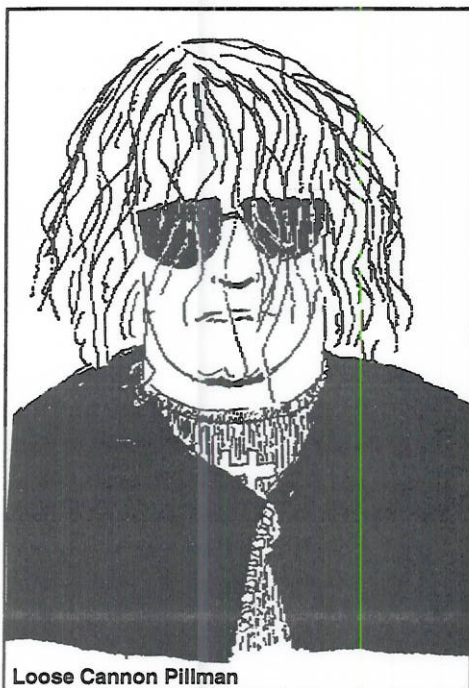
(9) Who did Sting beat to win the prestigious United States Heavyweight Title in 1995?

A. Um, lemme see, Ric Flair, maybe.

B. Nah, it wasn't him, they had some kinda tournament, right?

C. Yeah, but I don't remember who was in the finals.

D. Well, he had to have beaten somebody.



Loose Cannon Pillman

(10) The Evil Genius, Part I: Why did Tod "Is God" Gordon all of a sudden become a major part of the ECW television show and the Bill Alfonso angle?

- A. He had just announced plans to cease financial support of ECW.
- B. He might want some of the hundreds of thousands of dollars he put into the promotion in the past few years back.
- C. He's got "star quality" oozing from every pore.
- D. At least two of the above answers.

(11) The Evil Genius, Part II: Why was Rob Feinstein, ECW's video dealer, all of a sudden made an on-the-air character and chokeslammed by company mascot 911?

- A. ECW owed Feinstein thousands of dollars at the time.
- B. ECW was receiving a slew of complaints about late tapes, and wanted to set the blame in their fans' eyes on something besides ECW.
- C. He's got "star quality" oozing from every pore.
- D. At least two of the above answers.

(12) True or False: Cactus Jack did a series of interviews on ECW TV ripping the very concept of "Hardcore Wrestling" as an affectionate rib on ECW fans, the type of fans who made him a wrestling star.

(13) Pick the one phony name from this list of independent wrestling names that appeared in the

wrestling media in 1995:

- A. Chuck the Kosher Killer.
- B. Dreaded Apparatus
- C. Wichita Willie
- D. Cletus the Fetus and The Abortionist—The Pro Life/Pro Choice Connection
- E. Bob the Butcher
- F. The Tulip
- G. The Hare Krishna

(14) Kids Today Part I: WCW bookers took note of 1995's big "Geography" craze and decided they had the perfect new name that would finally make Brian Pillman a big star. Which great geographic name did WCW give to Brian Pillman?

- A. Ohio Brian
- B. Nevada Brian
- C. Idaho Brian
- D. California Brian

(15) What was the reason Max Muscle was employed by WCW and, in fact, featured on many of their television shows?

- A. His ability to do all of two basic wrestling moves.
- B. His scintillating wrestling interviews.
- C. His charismatic personality.
- D. For Max, his name is a verb as well as a noun.

(16) Was I really sitting in a seat in the balcony during that SMW show wearing a white "Duke" cap and a pair of sunglasses when Jim Cornette and, tellingly, Buddy Landel came up the stairs to beat my ass?

- A. Yes.
- B. No.
- C. Maybe.

(17) After drawing the biggest non-pay-per-view houses of any promotion in the U.S., and producing the critically acclaimed "When World's Collide" show last year the IWC/AAA capitalized on their momentum in the country's second largest market by...

- A. producing pay-per-view shows every three months.
- B. expanding to the San Antonio market.
- C. starting an English language version of their TV show.
- D. waiting nine long months to run another show in L.A.

(18) The WWF decided to show their appreciation to their local fans during a Madison

Square Garden show by...

- A. announcing tickets would be half price for the next show.
- B. passing out thousands of free Bret Hart t-shirts.
- C. having the wrestlers go into the stands and shake hands.
- D. having Henry O. Godwinn throw a bucket of rancid "slop" over three or so rows of fans with the highest priced tickets.

(19) Kids Today, Part II: WCW took note of that "Television" craze sweeping the country and decided to give Brian Pillman another name that would surely put him over the top with the fans. What new "Television" name did they give Pillman?

- A. "Saved by the Bell" Brian
- B. "E.R." Pillman
- C. "Dateline" Brian
- D. "Martin" Pillman
- E. "Baywatch" Brian

(20) Pick the one signature finishing move that Hulk Hogan didn't pop right up from, never sold, or in some way tried to totally ruin to make himself look like a tough guy to his army of Hulkamaniacs:

- A. Randy Savage's top rope elbow
- B. Ric Flair's chops to the chest.
- C. Arn Anderson's spine-buster
- D. Lex Luger's torture rack
- E. Ken Shamrock's kneebar submission



Jim Cornette

(21) WWF star Bret Hart honored the patriarch of his family, his father Stu Hart, at the tribute show honoring the long-time promoter's fifty years in the business by...

A. reading a poem he wrote especially for the occasion.

B. by presenting his father with a 24 carat gold plaque.

C. by taking a group portrait with all of his siblings.

D. by arranging to have a bronze bust of his own head presented to himself at the show.

(22) True or False: Despite the fact the guy actually had wrestled for them with a broken arm ECW fans serenaded the absent Sabu with a chorus of "F— Sabu" when he no-showed an ECW Arena event.

(23) Why is North Carolina the greatest state in the Union?

A. It's the state where the Wright Brothers invented the airplane.

B. It's the home of the Research Triangle—host of several major universities and scientific centers.

C. Its picturesque mountains and sandy beaches lure visitors from around the world.

D. It's the home of Tobacco Road, the hotbed of college basketball.

E. It's the state that rose as one and gave Hulk Hogan the reception he so richly deserved on Monday Nitro.

(24) In a letter to the *Wrestling Observer*, Jim Cornette self-righteously complained about negative press regarding unpaid bills in SMW and challenged anyone to name a wrestler that he owed money to for more than ten days. What wrestler never came back to Smoky because he wasn't paid a four-figure amount he was owed for over six months?

A. Cactus Jack

B. No one else was ever paid close to four figures.

(25) Lex Luger was featured in a months-long program in the WWF in 1994 where good guy Tatanka didn't trust him because he suspected him of "selling out" to the Million Dollar Man Ted DiBiase. What was the ironic twist that made this angle so memorable?

A. Lex Luger didn't sell out to the Million

Dollar Man, after all.

B. It was Tatanka who really sold out to the Million Dollar Man.

C. Lex sold out to Billionaire Ted in 1995, instead.

(26) Which of the following glamorous TV stars was known for wearing the most pancake make-up on camera?

A. "Sister" Sherri Martel

B. "BodyDonna" Sonny

C. "Beulah" McGillicutty

D. "Mean" Gene Okerlund

(27) What do King Kong Bundy, I.R.S., Kama, and Mabel have in common?

A. They all have silly names.

B. Not one of them had a two star performance in a match all year.

C. No one wanted to see them wrestle.

D. They all main evented at pay-per-views against the WWF's phenom, The Undertaker.

E. All of the above.

(28) What was the reason Buddy Landel gave, when asked, for not wearing knee pads in any of his matches, except for the one against then-Intercontinental Champion Shawn Michaels?

A. "Wrestling's a man's sport. I don't need no stinking pads!"

B. "I don't know. I just find them uncomfortable."

C. "I get up higher on the spinning elbow drop without them."

D. "So I'm never tempted to take bumps, brother."

(29) Pharmaceutical Phenomenon the Ultimate Warrior set another landmark in the wrestling business when he...

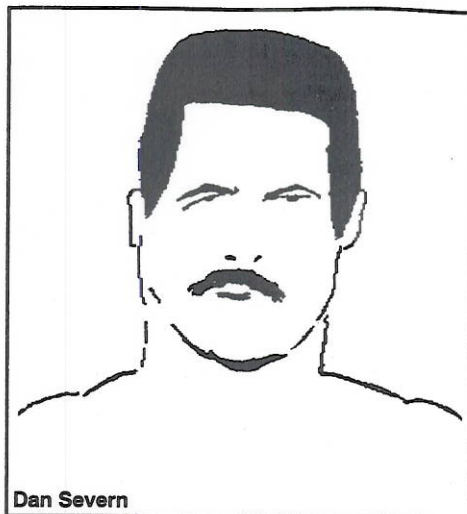
A. signed an exclusive contract with WCW to be managed by Jimmy Hart.

B. won the WWF Title from Diesel in five seconds in his return to Madison Square Garden.

C. discussed his steroid abuse on ABC's *Wide World of Sports*.

D. no-showed his own debut as a wrestling promoter, driving his partner into bankruptcy.

(30) UFC tough guy cult hero Tank Abbott regaled his entourage with tales of how fellow Ultimate Ultimate competitor Dan Severn, a



Dan Severn

multiple national wrestling champion, "punches like a girl." When the big Tank had his chance against Severn at the prestigious Ultimate Ultimate tournament he proved his point by...

A. knocking him out with two quick rabbit punches.

B. storming through the competition in less than five minutes each en route to the championship.

C. making him submit to his new finisher "The Tank Tread"

D. lying on his stomach like a grounded fish and covering his head with his hands while Severn punched him at will the entire match.

(31) Col. Robert "Tripod" Parker was abruptly placed into a unique romance with Sherri Martel by the WCW bookers because...

A. of his consummate acting ability.

B. of his leading-man looks.



King Kong Bundy

C. Gene Okerlund could then leer at the camera and claim that Parker is "a big man in the wrestling business" for reasons other than his managerial ability.

(32) Veteran independent wrestler Al Snow finally moved into the spotlight through his work in high profile promotions like SMW, ECW, and a memorable cameo in UFC ("What do you think he's gonna do? He's gonna have sex."), becoming "Wrestling's Hottest Free Agent." Snow had both of the Big Two promotions in a bidding war for his services. How did the WWF reward this fresh new start for choosing to sign with them?

A. They put him in a championship tag team as the 1-2-3 Kid II.

B. They started him in a "Sex Toy" versus "Boy Toy" feud.

C. They gave him the heel commentator slot on "Superstars."

D. They gave him one whole match on TV and sent him home.

(33) True or False: Marcus Alexander Bagwell almost lost his job and his legs when his new calf implants (calf implants?!?!) exploded—cosmetic surgery that was totally unnecessary because of the tights Bagwell wears.

(34) Wrestling WReality (and Reality is winning): Mike Lano had an eclectic year in his self-appointed "job" of pestering retired and

active wrestlers around the globe. Which of the following is just too bizarre to have happened to even the FanBoy Oddity?

A. He was widely thought to have been the first person in the history of the *Wrestling Observer* to be described as "borderline psychotic."

B. He was publicly caught making up a phony interview with Doug Gilbert in his necrophilic "tribute" to the late Eddie Gilbert.

C. Despite having a dental practice, he constantly, and unsuccessfully, nagged WCW for an entry level job.

D. He found himself banned by acclamation from SMW's annual Fan Week, when a majority of fans cancelled because they heard he was coming.

E. He threatened to sue the "New York producer" of his cable access T.V. wrestling show for cutting out his weird segments and replacing them with the producer's own weird segments on racism in the U.S.

F. He set the all-time record for consecutive non-sequiturs in a row with his own "writing."

G. Nothing is too bizarre for Mike Lano.

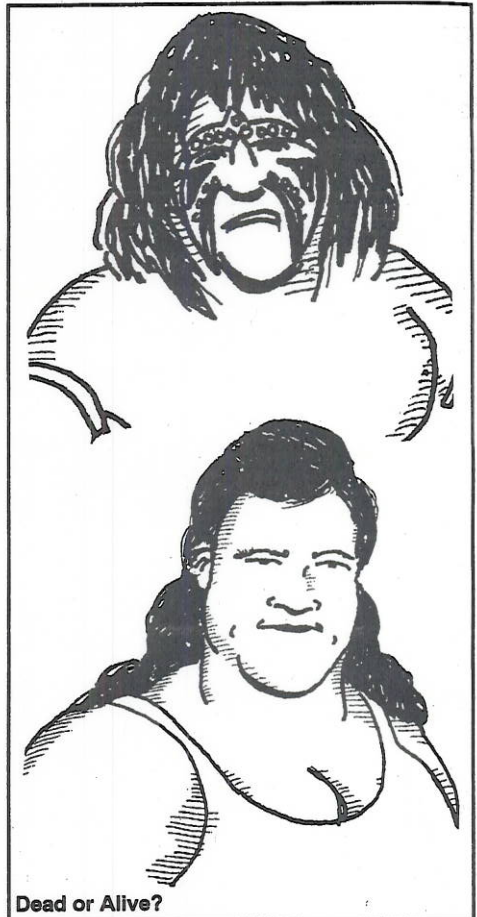
(35) True or False: After having a Cross Tai Pei Death Match with Axl Rotten in the ECW Arena, Ian Rotten tried to sell his bloody t-shirt off his back to a fan, who just stared at him with disgust.

(36) What was the most number of holds demonstrated by ten year wrestling veteran Lex Luger in a single match this year?

- A. Two
- B. Three
- C. Four
- D. Five
- E. Six

(37) After WCW's Bash at the Beach pay-per-view, the NBA's Dennis Rodman decided to mix with his fans by walking from the beach across the street to the hotel. Hulk Hogan decided to maintain his privacy at the same time by...

- A. quietly taking a limousine with his entourage to the hotel.
- B. staying behind and thanking the production crew for all of their hard work.
- C. driving his family to a quiet restaurant.
- D. walking side-by-side with Rodman wearing a towel over his head and yelling at any fan who dared approach him.



(38) CyberGeeks Dept.: What do Scott Steiner, Scott Armstrong, Matt Osbourne, The Ultimate Warrior, and Harley Race all have in common?

- A. They all have been wrestlers.
- B. They all are alive.
- C. They all were reported on the internet to have died sometime in '95.
- D. All of the above.

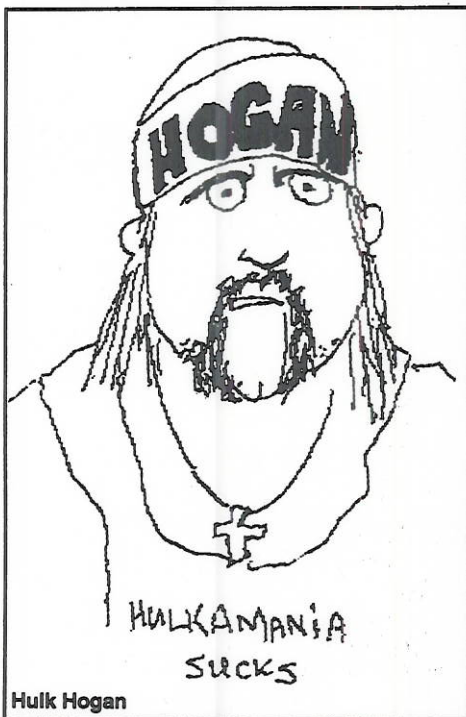
(39) True or False: Jeff Jarrett actually defeated WWF jobber to the stars Bob Holly to win the WWF Intercontinental Title during 1995.

(40) What do the Diamond Doll and Cobra have in common?

- A. Both can't wrestle.
- B. Both work for WCW.
- C. Both had breast augmentation surgery.
- D. All of the above.

(41) Which of the following did The Roadie Brian Armstrong decide was better for his wrestling career in 1995?

- A. Working as a main event babyface for the World Wrestling Federation.
- B. Staying home.
- C. Smoking marijuana.



(42) Incredibly, Lex Luger appeared to have gained an estimated 15 to 20 pounds of muscle within two weeks of his surprise return to WCW. Which is the best explanation for this shocking turn of events?

A. He ate healthier because he was no longer partaking in the WWF's gruelling travel schedule.

B. He got to work out at his own gym, too.

C. He could now afford only the best in nutritional supplements.

D. The same explanation for why Randy Savage quit wearing his shirt in the ring when he joined WCW.

(43) Verne, Vince, or Eric: Each of the following statements refers to either Verne Gagne, Vince McMahon, or Eric Bischoff or some combination of the three. Was it Verne, Vince, or Eric who:

I. Had his all-time biggest gates with Hulk Hogan.

II. Used modern techniques and resources to squeeze out rivals.

III. Everybody thinks it's a toupee.

IV. Needs a toupee.

V. Tried to bury Hogan when Hogan left.

VI: Used OPM (Other People's Money) to make his mark.

VII: Lost his business by not changing fast enough with the times.

VIII: Employed "Mean" Gene Okerlund.

IX: Claimed he made Hogan a star.

X. Claimed he'd just make someone else a bigger star.

XI. "Stole" his rival's biggest stars to make a splash.

XII. Claimed his older, more established rival was "out of touch."

XIII. Claimed his younger, more aggressive rival "didn't know wrestling."

XIV. Has so far unrealized aspirations to be a wrestler.

XV: Has so far unrealized aspirations to be a game show host.

XVI. Realized aspirations to be a butcher.

XVII. Tried to garner sympathy with fans by claiming to be an underdog picked on by a bully.

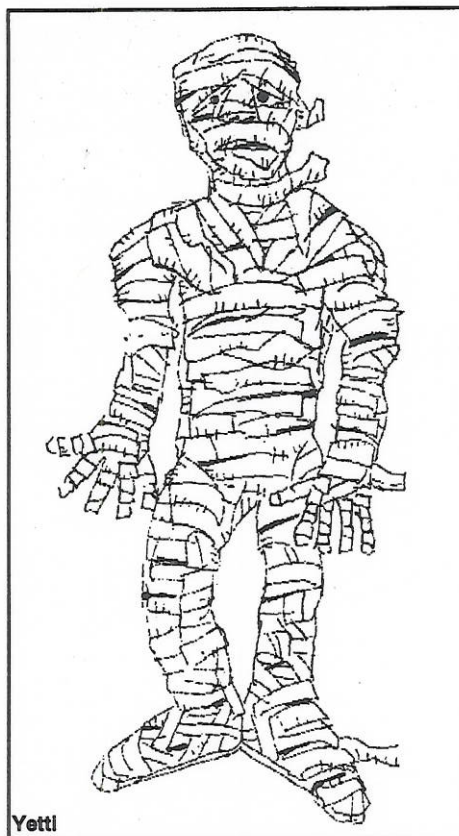
XVIII: Made Hulk Hogan what he is today.

(44) A Yeti is...

A. another term for Abominable Snowman.

B. another term for The Mummy.

C. another term for No Talent Basketball Player Wrapped in Dirty Toilet Paper.



(45) When The Giant had his first face-to-face meeting with Hulk Hogan, he gave him the shirt off Andre's back, raising the question in the fans' minds:

A. I wonder if that shirt's been cleaned?

B. Why didn't he give him some matching slacks?

C. Isn't that a little feminine for a big, tough wrestler?

D. Isn't that the Poofy Shirt from Seinfeld?

E. I wonder if that big guy can drive one of those Monster Trucks?

(46) ECW fans chanted "He's Hardcore, He's Hardcore" at their fave Tommy Dreamer because of...

A. his realistic brawling style.

B. his innovative mat work.

C. his tough but fair attitude toward women.

D. his ass-kissing interviews about those great hardcore ECW fans.

(47) Titan Sports rewarded Bam Bam Bigelow for his superb effort in helping recruit, train, and carry NFL superstar Lawrence Taylor to the most newsworthy Wrestlemania main event in a decade by:

A. making him WWF Champion.

B. booking him on the Tonight Show with Taylor.

C. printing a special issue of the WWF

Magazine devoted to his career.

D. demoting him to opening match jobber.

(48) Sting set a new benchmark for the professional wrestling industry when...

A. he won the U.S. Title for the seventh time.

B. he wrestled Hulk Hogan in the Battle of the Superstars.

C. he wrestled in his 20th consecutive Clash of the Champions.

D. when he was turned on and beaten up by Ric Flair for the fourth consecutive time, beating the old record set by Dusty Rhodes and Ole Anderson in the 1970s.

(49) What do Bobby "The Brain" Heenan and The Sandman have in common?

A. They both have dyed blonde hair.

B. They both bear the scars of years of bumps.

C. They both play heels.

D. They both prepare for big shows the same way.

(50) If indeed Hulk Hogan and Randy Savage missed every group drug test at Center Stage in 1995, what would easily explain such an amazing coincidence?

A. Hey, they weren't on the booking sheets then.

B. They had previously scheduled personal appearances they had to fulfill.

C. WCW can just test them the next time. They've got nothing to hide.

D. And anyway, if Randy Savage and Hulk Hogan don't understand the evils of drug abuse, who does?

Answer Key: (1) d; (2) a; (3) b; (4) e; (5) d; (6) d; (7) d; (8) e; (9) d; (10) d; (11) d; (12) false; (13) b; (14) d; (15) d; (16) a; (17) d; (18) d; (19) e; (20) e; (21) d; (22) false, it was a broken neck; (23) d; (24) a; (25) c; (26) d; (27) e; (28) d; (29) d; (30) d; (31) c; (32) d; (33) true; (34) g; (35) false, the fan bought the shirt; (36) e; (37) d; (38) d; (39) true; (40) d; (41) b; (42) d; (43) I: Verne, Vince, Eric; II: Verne, Vince, Eric; III: Vince, Eric; IV: Verne; V: Vince, Verne; VI: Vince, Eric; VII: Verne; VIII: Verne, Vince, Eric; IX: Verne, Vince; X: Verne, Vince; XI: Vince, Eric; XII: Vince, Eric; XIII: Verne, Vince; XIV: Vince; XV: Eric; XVI: Verne; XVII: Verne, Vince; XVIII: steroids; (44) c; (45) d; (46) d; (47) d; (48) d; (49) d; (50) d

Special thanks to John Hitchcock for his patience and good humor and not this year drawing all of the wrestlers so they look like John Hitchcock.

chris zavisa's 1995

J A P A N

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

For at least the fifth year in a row, the Japanese Big Three stayed firmly in place sitting atop the heap of Japanese wrestling promotions. They jockey back and forth changing positions but when all is said and done, we all know who will contend for the top spots each year.

No. 1: New Japan

In 1995, the top spot without so much as a whimper of doubt goes to New Japan Pro Wrestling. In fact, were this a baseball pennant race, New Japan would have locked up the flag by Memorial Day. If it were a horse race, New Japan would have won by forty lengths. And if it were a presidential election, they would have won in a crushing landslide.

When I write these articles each year I employ a variety of subjective measurements to determine the rankings. Among the more important are the ability to sell tickets, financial profitability, quality of matches, and booking strengths. In past years New Japan made more money than anyone else and in 1995 they made even more. In ticket sales they may have had more customers than the next two major promotions combined.

Consider just a few of their more gigantic gates. Jan. 4 at the Egg Dome drew 62,500, two shows in Sapporo in early February drew 25,000, two shows in North Korea in April drew 340,000 total, in May at the Fukuoka Dome they drew 50,000, and an Egg Dome record setting 67,000 for their Oct. 3 show. In addition to those mammoth gates, they did over a dozen other shows with five-figure crowds including selling out Sumo Hall five straight nights in August.

If attendance figures alone do not impress you, add to them the fact that in Japan ticket prices resemble that of Broadway plays or the heavyweight prize fights. Ringside tickets priced at several hundred each are not uncommon for the big spectacles. The total gate for a Dome show can easily run over \$5 million and with gimmick sales over 6.5 million.

New Japan also made noticeable improvements in their match quality throughout the year. They phased down some tired veterans, elevated younger workers, and created a heated three-way feud out of ashes that had cooled over a decade ago. Just when the modern Ishingun scenario began to fade, along came the New Japan vs. UWFI clash which captured the imagination of the Japanese wrestling world like nothing in this decade.

Their showcase trio of Keiji Muto, Shinya Hashimoto, and Masa Chono all showed growth over the year. The

bestowing of the IWGP Title seemed to elevate Muto's lagging workrate restoring him to heights he had not achieved for at least three years. Chono turned into the best heel in Japan and became the cornerstone of a valuable army. Shinya Hashimoto was once one of the dullest wrestlers in the world but has now developed a sense of how to work a match in the context of a strong storyline with measured dramatic moments. While these three cannot compare with the quality of Baba's talented top trio, they do not have to since the remainder of the New Japan roster is so strong and balanced.

Booker Riki Choshu now has some five dozen athletes to work with and he does a masterful job in keeping the public interested in his product. He has several varied groups to bring to the forefront as needed. Consider that the junior heavyweights usually have the consistently best matches in the promotion. In 1995, the junior division was noticeably phased down without hurting the overall promotion one bit.

Just two years ago New Japan president Seiki Sakaguchi was quoted as saying Jushin Liger was their most valuable player. In 1995 Liger meant next to nothing and the promotion had their best year ever.

No. 2: All Japan

Mitsuharu Misawa, Kenta Kobashi, and Toshiaki Kawada are perhaps the three best mens workers in all the world. All three work for Giant Baba and his All Japan Pro Wrestling promotion. Only the All Japan Women, (who hardly have the promotional competition All Japan does) have that type of talent dominance. No men's group anywhere in Japan or the world can come close to those three. With a nucleus of excellence like that it is difficult to attend an All Japan card without seeing at least one outstanding match.

When you examine a list of the year's best matches, the top men's bouts are consistently found in three areas. First, the main events of the All Japan Budokan shows. Second, matches from the Spring All Japan Carnival singles tournament. Third, matches from the late Fall Real World Tag Team Tournament. And always the names of Misawa, Kawada, and Kobashi are involved.

When *Weekly Pro Wrestling* magazine staged its thirteen match card with thirteen different Japanese promotions, it was rival New Japan that was awarded the prestigious main event slot. All Japan, despite its years of seniority, had to be content with the semi-main. But as the fans left the Tokyo Dome on Apr. 2, most were surely in agreement that the All Japan six-man 30 minute draw was the best bout on the show, while New Japan's IWGP Title match was a major disappointment.

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All Japan ranks below New Japan due to a noticeable talent drop off once you get beyond the Talented Three. When the strength of an entire card is considered, both New Japan and All Japan Women beat Baba's group by a mile. The other fact that prevents All Japan from the top spot is their reluctance to expand into big stadium shows with the truly awe-inspiring gates. Baba is content to run seven Budokan shows while limiting the rest of the schedule to small arenas that seat between two and five thousand fans. Meanwhile, New Japan staged three separate Dome shows, plus two mammoth Korean spectaculars making front page news in most Japanese papers.

The accomplishment of selling out 16,300 seats seven times in a year should not be minimized. But when you compare that with New Japan's success, they are clearly number two.

The one major plus in the talent roster was the addition of former UWFI grappler Gary Albright. While Albright is considered a major player, it is far too soon to evaluate how he will fit in with the Big Three over the long haul. Toward the end of the season, he did have several impressive outings. If Steve Williams makes a return early in 1996, his joining with Albright could fill out the top of All Japan's roster.

Johnny Ace and Akira Taue continue to show improvement and can more than hold their own in four- and six-man tags with the Big Three. On the other hand, time appears to have finally caught up with all time great Stan Hansen who in his best efforts was only able to manage decent outings. Just a year ago, and more so two years ago, Hansen was having one great bout after another.

One time wonder rookie Jun Akiyama seems to have plateaued and failed to crack the group's upper echelon in 1995. Tsuyoshi Kikuchi is half the worker he was for most of the early 1990s. The word out of the locker room is that Kikuchi can no longer handle complicated matches with intricate finishes. Perhaps five years of hellacious bumps have finally caught up with him.

All Japan Pro Wrestling has made Shohei Baba a very wealthy celebrity. Revenue from 1995 increased that wealth and that will only continue in 1996. Baba has a long, established formula that works extremely well for him. He will continue to employ it no matter how far New Japan pushes the envelope in the future.

No. 3: All Japan Women

For the last two years, the Matsunaga brothers have watched their once tiny promotion blossom into one of the world's best. Their scrapbook years, 1993 and 1994, brought financial and aesthetic success. In 1995 they were in a steady holding pattern.

The group's match quality continues to be

superb, with arguably the best overall cards found anywhere in the world. They have Manami Toyota, the best female wrestler of all time and perhaps the number one wrestler of either sex in the world today. Toyota's dominance of the group became complete in 1995 as she was twice crowned WWWA World Champion, first defeating Aja Kong on Mar. 26 and later Dynamite Kansai on Dec. 4.

Both Kong and Kansai embody the big, strong, powerful wrestler that many believe is the ideal champion. The decisive elevation of the small, lithe Toyota over both is meant to make a clear statement about the superiority of pure wrestling ability over size and power. This is a real change for the promotion considering that for 69 out of 72 months the promotion's world title was held by the group's largest sized athletes.

Business was not quite what it was in 1994 with no record-breaking Tokyo Dome show bringing in millions in revenue. Instead they went with shows at Budokan Hall, Sumo Hall, Yokohama Arena, and Osaka Castle Hall. The results ranged from moderate successes to near sellouts.

Besides the crowning of Toyota, there were other talent moves as well. Mima Shimoda finally was placed into the upper group of singles competitors and more than met the challenge. Akira Hokuto returned to a schedule somewhere between full- and part-time providing another guaranteed excellent match on the card. At the close of 1995, Hokuto and Shimoda were feuding tag team partners who shared the World Titles. In 1996 the sparks should continue to fly and a Shimoda victory over the legendary Hokuto could be just the thing she needs to make her a major player in the fans' eyes.

Although the trio of Jaguar Yokota, Lioness Asaka, and Bison Kimura are past their prime and are no longer realistic competitors for singles titles, they were a valuable addition to the middle of the card. And the group continued to get top flight performances from Aja Kong, Bull Nakano, Kyoko Inoue, Takako Inoue, and Toshiyo Yamada. American Reggie Bennett continued to show improvement while veteran Yumiko Hotta was featured in some brutal kickfests.

If anything sounds too good to be true, it most likely is. AJW has a major problem looming on the horizon. Almost all of the group's nucleus are now in their mid-20s with some well past the once mandatory retirement age of 26. Sake Hasegawa has announced her impending retirement due to a nagging neck injury. She will be a major loss for the group since there is nobody behind her anywhere nearly ready to move up.

Over the past four years, the group has failed to produce a major new star. The closest they came was with the talented Chaparita Asari, but she is forever limited by her diminutive size. The

few women who seemed to have the skills to advance—Saemi Numata and Chikako Shiratori, quickly retired.

In 1995 they began to push the pretty Yumi Fukawa, who will not be 20 until next May. They envision Fukawa playing the same role that Mimi Hagiwara did in the early 1980s as a combination wrestler and beauty queen. Hagiwara pulled it off to perfection while it was far too soon to guess about Fukawa.

The best female wrestlers to emerge in the last few years have all come from other promotions. JWP first came up with Hikari Fukuoka then Candy Okutsu, then Hiroumi Yagi. They have several rookies on this year's roster who show great potential. Chigusa Nagayo's GAEA group has a warehouse full of young talent, some of which could develop into first-line performers.

If AJW keeps failing to develop their own major newcomers, they will have to come up with other strategies. They certainly have the funds to conduct an outright talent raid on JWP to acquire talents such as Fukuoka, Okutsu, and Yagi. But that is a very non-Japanese way to do business and it seems to be only the remotest of possibilities. They will probably continue to work a limited inter-promotional schedule with other women's groups as needed for big shows.

They could continue to push the established veterans, working them into their late-20s or until there are noticeable signs of physical deterioration. They could expand the inter-promotional talent trading with other groups back to 1993 levels. How AJW solves this crucial problem will go a long way to determining their future over the next three to five years.

THE NICHE PROMOTIONS

The Big Three are still firmly cemented at the top, but the rest of the Top Ten went through major adjustments. Among the second tier, things most definitely did not stay the same. Just one year ago the UWFI was no. 4 and climbing. Today it is sayonarra UWFI. They are now part of New Japan Pro Wrestling.

FMW was the Atsushi Onita promotion appearing before impressive crowds. Now, those days are just yellowing clippings in the FMW scrapbook. The IWA was a floundering upstart group which barely broke into the Top Ten. It was not clear if they could even last the year. This year they climbed to no. 4.

#4 IWA

Of all the ten groups profiled in this listing, Victor Quinones's IWA made the most dramatic progress, leapfrogging from no. 10 all the way to no. 4. They were helped by the fall of the UWFI, the reorganization of FMW, and the static nature of both WAR and RINGS.

Quinones also can claim a lot of individual credit for his group's success. He went into the

TOP 25 CARDS OF THE YEAR

1..	190,000	4/29	Pyongan, N. Korea	New Japan
2.	150,000	4/28	Pyongan, N. Korea	New Japan
3.	67,000	10/9	Tokyo Egg Dome	New Japan
4.	62,000	1/4	Tokyo Egg Dome	New Japan
5.	60,000	4/2	Tokyo Egg Dome	Weekly Pro Magazine
6.	58,250	5/5	Kawasaki Stadium	FMW
7.	50,000	5/3	Fukuoka Dome	New Japan
8.	28,757	8/20	Kawasaki Stadium	IWA
9.	16,500	1/16	Tokyo Budokan Hall	UFI
10.	16,300	3/4	Tokyo Budokan Hall	All Japan
11.	16,300	4/5	Tokyo Budokan Hall	All Japan
12.	16,300	6/9	Tokyo Budokan Hall	All Japan
13.	16,300	7/24	Tokyo Budokan Hall	All Japan
14.	16,300	9/10	Tokyo Budokan Hall	All Japan
15.	16,300	10/25	Tokyo Budokan Hall	All Japan
16.	16,300	12/9	Tokyo Budokan Hall	All Japan
17.	16,000	6/14	Tokyo Budokan Hall	New Japan
18.	16,000	9/23	Yokohama Arena	New Japan
19.	15,500	9/1	Tokyo Budokan Hall	Pancrase
20.	14,800	9/2	Tokyo Budokan Hall	All Japan Women
21.	12,000	10/28	Tokyo Gym	New Japan/UWFI
22-25.	11,500	***	Tokyo Sumo Hall	New Japan

*** There were at least six events at Sumo Hall in Tokyo with crowds of 11,500. Five were from New Japan on Aug. 11-15 with the sixth the combined J-Cup Tournament on 12/3.

The dominance of New Japan is easy to see with 11 shows on the list and five in the top ten including record-setting shows in North Korea and a Tokyo Egg Dome record for any event ever held there.

All Japan has seven shows on the list with one in the top ten. Seven other groups had shows on the list but none more than one appearance.

The big difference between 1995 and 1994 was the absorption of the UWFI into New Japan by the end of the year. In 1994, the UWFI had eight shows on the list with four in the top ten.

Last year's cut-off figure for inclusion in the top 25 was 12,000. In 1993 it was 11,500. In 1992 it was 10,510.

year with a solid core group of amazing talent including Terry Funk and the underrated Head Hunters. Quinones added Cactus Jack to the mix and in doing so struck gold.

Many had thought that Cactus Jack would be a major star in Japan if only given the chance. The Japanese love anyone who devotes 100 percent to their work and few in the business will go to the lengths that Mick Foley will go to in the quest of getting over. The one surprise was that Cactus's success did not come in the rings of FMW, but rather in the group which replaced it. It is fortunate for Cactus it happened that way.

In 1995, Quinones gambled mightily with an expensive spectacular staged at Kawasaki Stadium. Just a few months before they had trouble selling 2,000 and now they were hoping to pack an outdoor ballpark. The event was building around a King of the Death Match tournament with every possible blood letting gimmick stipulation thrown in for variety.

They failed to pack the park, but did sell a more than respectable 28,757 tickets, thanks in part to Dan Severn's NWA Title defense. Terry Funk showed his professionalism by doing a job

to Cactus, which made Cactus an instant star in Japan.

As Cactus established himself in Japan, he found the perfect foe in Shoji Nakamaki. Cactus was not shy telling Americans that it was pure joy to work with somebody who would match him move for crazy move and never turn down any spot that he called. Nakamaki may not possess all the skills Cactus does, but his willingness to give 100 percent has made him a valuable player in IWA.

Throughout the year the IWA staged some of the most watchable bouts seen in any men's promotion. Most notable was the May 1 Battle of the Head Hunters.

The Kawasaki Stadium Death Match gimmick put IWA on the map. Now regular month-to-month business must keep them there.

No. 5: Pancrase

During its first two calendar years of operation Pancrase was not rated in these articles. The promotion claimed that it was definitely not pro wrestling. It was pure wrestling involving true competitive contests which just happened to use

many former pro wrestlers.

In 1995 that claim went out the window with two developments. First, with the emergence of the Ultimate Fights and Vale Tudo, it became obvious that what occurred in a Pancrase ring was not a legitimate fight. Pancrase employs the most realistic worked style in the world. But the key word in that sentence is not "realistic," but "worked." Second, all doubts should have been erased on Apr. 2 when Pancrase joined with 12 other pro wrestling promotions for the *Weekly Pro Wrestling* magazine card at the Tokyo Dome.

Pancrase is a lot more than just the sum of its parts. It has true stars in Masa Funaki and Minoru Suzuki and Ken Shamrock. It has a fanatical following whose legions can be traced back to the UWF shooting maniacs of a decade ago.

They follow the tried and true strong style formula employed by Rings and the UWFI of staging monthly shows in mid-sized arenas garnering crowds from four-to-seven thousand. The contrivance being the bouts take such a physical toll out of the combatants they need a full four weeks to recover.

In 1995 the group had several major successes. They drew 3,679 in January at Nagoya, 5,560 in March in Yokohama, and duplicated their Nagoya crowd again in April. In May they packed 7,000 into Tokyo Bay NK Hall to watch Suzuki take their King of Pancrase Title from Shamrock. In June to November, they did just under 4,900 in shows in Sapporo and Yokohama.

The year's biggest success came on a Sept. 1 Budokan Hall card before an announced crowd of 15,500. By year's end they were back in Sapporo before nearly 5,000.

With Funaki as the group's biggest star, they wisely placed the belt on three other wrestlers, the latest being European import Bas Rutten.

The specter of the UWFI hangs heavy over the head of Pancrase. One year ago the UWFI was challenging to become one of the nation's premier wrestling promotions. They had four shows in the Top Ten for 1994 and eight in the Top 25. In January 1995, they sold out Budokan Hall. By late fall, they were no longer in existence as an independent promotion.

The brains behind Pancrase fear that as more exposure is given to UFC and Vale Tudo, their product could suffer by comparison and lose its thin sheen of legitimacy. Then it could be Masa Funaki who finds himself doing jobs for Antonio Inoki on New Japan shows.

#6 Michinoku/#7 Rings

The number six and seven groups in Japan are Michinoku and Rings. Or if you prefer, Rings and Michinoku. They were that close. Of all the promotions in this listing, it was Rings and Michinoku that stayed nearly exactly as they were in 1994. They did not climb upward. They did not slide downwards. It was as if 1994 had 24 months.

Michinoku continued to operate a youth-based promotion built around the impressive talents of The Great Sasuke and Super Delphin. They continued to employ the same style blending Mexican Lucha and New Japan junior heavyweight wrestling. They continued to be based in Northern Japan with occasional forays into Tokyo and other metropolitan areas. Crowds for small town spot shows continued in the three digits while they packed the obligatory 2,000 into Korakuen Hall several times.

Rings is still based around the persona of Akira Maeda. The image of American singer Jimmy Buffett comes to mind. The man who has become more identified with parrots and margaritas has not had a hit in a long, long time, but his fans really don't care. Maeda, minus the parrot and drink, is the Jimmy Buffet of the Japanese wrestling world.

Rings still employs the strong style formula that dates back to the original run of the UWF in the 1980s. They still use a combination of native talent and European imports to fill out the card and provide fodder for Maeda. The crowds in 1995 were nearly identical to those of the previous year drawing between 2,000 and 8,000 for their monthly shows.

Both groups run stripped down operations which permit them to survive with only a fraction of the income the Big Three earn. Both groups seem settled into a comfortable niche and are happy to be surviving there.

The one main difference that could spell change is the contrast in age of the main wrestlers. Michinoku's stars are all in their 20s and show no sign of waning. Maeda is well past his prime and every year he can continue is a gift. For the past two years, speculation has centered on when Maeda will elevate youngster Yoshihisa Yamamoto to the top spot over himself. It would be to Maeda's and the promotion's benefit for that move to come in 1996.

No. 8: FMW

For the first 18 weeks of 1995, Japan's Big Three promotions became the Big Four. FMW, which had been the best of the smaller niche promotions, finally broke from the pack doing the kind of box office that only New Japan, All Japan, and All Japan Women were used to.

Atsushi Onita was in the last portion of his year long retirement tour and the fans came out in big numbers to see him or his alter ego, The Great Nita. On May 5 in Kawasaki Stadium, it all came to an explosive climax with FMW getting its largest crowd of all time with 58,250 attending. Onita did battle with the hooded Hayabusa in one of those explosive barbed wire gimmick death extravaganzas that FMW has perfected to the last sizzle and pop. The outcome is obvious.

But as Onita departed, so also did the real FMW. It was quietly divested of its financial assets and recapitalized under a new organizational structure. The FMW that

ZAVISA'S FIVE YEAR TOP TEN PROMOTIONS				
1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
1. All Japan	All Japan	AJ Women	AJ Women	New Japan
2. New Japan	New Japan	New Japan	New Japan	All Japan
3. AJ Women	AJ Women	All Japan	All Japan	AJ Women
4. FMW	FMW	FMW	UWFI	IWA
5. RINGS	UWFI	UWFI	FMW	Pancrase
6. SWS	RINGS	WAR	WAE	Michinoku Pro
7. Universal	WAR	RINGS	Michinoku Pro	RINGS
8. UWFI	Fujiwara	JWP	RINGS	FMW
9. Fujiwara	WING	WING	JWP	WAR
10. JWP	JWP	LLPW	IWA	JWP

promoted for the final 34 weeks of the year was a very different creature than Onita's FMW. Besides losing their centerpiece, they also lost Tarzan Goto, Mr. Gannosuke to the IWA.

With Hayabusa at its center, it seemed to wobble back and forth between flying and brawling. They utterly failed to garner the crowds that had flocked to watch Onita play his human slice and dice game. It seemed their more successful dates were the standard 2,000 at Korakuen Hall. At many spot shows, the crowd looked more like a three digit Michinoku crowd than anything FMW had been used to.

By year's end the rumors of a possible Onita return had begun to surface, although at this point that is all they are. With Onita, FMW was the premier niche promotion in Japan who on occasion could even compete toe-to-toe with the Big Three. Without Onita, FMW is on the same level as Michinoku Pro but without their strong identity.

No. 9: WAR

Back in the Eisenhower years, Timex built its advertising campaign around the slogan, "It takes a licking, but keeps on ticking." The idea being while Timex priced their watches cheaply, they were not constructed cheaply. Those ten dollar timepieces which looked like they might fall apart in a strong wind magically kept on going always coming back for more, defying the experts.

In some ways, WAR has borrowed a healthy dose of the Timex philosophy. For most of the last two years, it appeared as if WAR survived only through the largess of New Japan and FMW. But when those two connections evaporated, WAR seemed on the verge of collapse. Like the favorite watch of John Cameron Swayze WAR keeps on ticking.

WAR, formerly SMW, was built around the considerable talents and figure of Genichiro Tenryu. Once upon a time, Tenryu was a joy to watch in the rings of All Japan. But those days are long gone. With each passing year, his wrestling skills have diminished and his legend seems to shrink. If that were not bad enough, a wrestler who once served at Tenryu's knee now gets more press, fan following, and TV commercial endorsements.

Back in his All Japan days, Hiromichi Fuyuki

was known as Samson Fuyuki. Along with partner Toshiaki Kawada, they comprised the tag team of Footloose. They were also part of Tenryu's army known as Revolution. Footloose was one of the best tag teams in the business. Then several things happened.

Fuyuki found himself a wife. Apparently it was a wife who knew how to cook since he blossomed into what some people snidely refer to as "Fatso Fuyuki." His in-ring skills seemed to vanish with each mouthful. When Tenryu jumped for the big yen of SWS, Fuyuki went with him. Kawada stayed with All Japan and is now one of the biggest stars in the business. Fuyuki is something of a goofy sports character who shills for a pizza company.

Fuyuki may not be much to watch in the ring anymore, but his face is certainly becoming well-known in Japan due to his many commercial appearances.

WAR seems to be a promotion with a large population of mid-card workers and no real stars. Looking over their matches from 1995, it is difficult to come up with anything memorable other than the July 7 Chris Jericho vs. Ultimate Dragon bout. They have many names who can be placed in decent spots including Gedo and Jado, Nobutaka Araya, and Shinichi Nakano but without the main anchor in the middle the group seems destined for mediocrity.

And probably the single worst public relations move of the year was when WAR rejected participation on the Apr. 2 Tokyo Dome inter-promotion show in favor of their own show at Korakuen Hall. That move alone speaks volumes about where WAR is headed.

#10: Japan Women's Pro

A few years ago, a JWP match was one of the more predictable in the business. With a small number of workers, they could only put on four or five bouts per card. The openers usually ran ten or more minutes with green competitors who should have stopped at five minutes. The semi-main and main events ran over 20 minutes and followed a formula of slow starts, slow middle, slow build-up, and decent finishes.

While they had some talent and most wrestlers worked hard, their overall quality was never considered their strong suit. Then beginning in

ZAVISA'S TOP 25 MALE WRESTLERS

	1994	1993
1) Mitsuharu Misawa (AJ)	6	7
2) Kenta Kobashi (AJ)	1	1
3) Toshiaki Kawada (AJ)	3	2
4) Chris Benoit (NJ)	2	4
5) Great Sasuke (MP)	4	13
6) Black Tiger (NJ)	11	22
7) Shinjiro Otani (NJ)	14	25
8) Shiro Koshinaka (NJ)	18	NR
9) Sabu (NJ)	15	8
10) Keiji Muto (NJ)	16	12
11) Hayabusa (FMW)	25	NR
12) Masa Chono (NJ)	13	11
13) Cactus Jack (IWA)	NR	NR
14) Hiroshi Hase (NJ)	6	3
15) Dan Kroffat (AJ)	19	14
16) Super Delphin (NP)	12	NR
17) Shinya Hashimoto (NJ)	NR	NR
18) El Samurai (NJ)	21	17
19) Nobuhiko Takada (UWFI)	10	9
20) Akira Taue (AJ)	NR	NR
21) Jushin Liger (NJ)	8	5
22) Ultimo Dragon (WAR)	NR	NR
23) Johnny Ace (AJ)	NR	NR
24) Stan Hansen (AJ)	9	6
25) Jun Akiyama (AJ)	22	18

NR = not rated that year

Based on a point system where the no. 1 wrestler gets 25 points, the no. 2 wrestlers gets 24 points, and so on, here are the rankings for the different promotions...

New Japan	11 total/160 pts. (125 in '94)
All Japan	8 total/95 pts. (121 in '94)
Michinoku Pro	2 total/31 pts. (45 in '94)
FMW	1 total/15 pts. (12 in '94)
IWA	1 total/13 pts. (NR in '94)
UWFI	1 total/7 pts. (22 in '94)
WAR	1 total/4 pts. (NR in '94)

1993, two things happened. A series of inter-promotional cards with AJW slowly caused JWP to modernize its style and upgrade its workrate. At the same time, JWP began to develop some first-rate younger talent in the persons of Hikari Fukuoka, Candy Okutsu, and Hiroumi Yagi. JWP went from a promotion of second-raters or older has-beens, to becoming a talented and well-balanced group. On any given card they can now put on at least one match that is in the same league with those found on AJW cards. That is progress.

The improvement in match quality is the real 1995 JWP story. It permitted them to have moderate success throughout the year and keep the promotions afloat.

Because of their small size and organizational structure, they cannot challenge the success or quality of AJW. They do not have to. If they play their political cards properly—and that is no easy task—they can use their young talent to continue to build. Keeping the relationship with AJW allows them to get a positive rub from association and helps to spread exposure for their product. That should permit them to stay in business.

Top Ten Stories of 1995

1) **April 2 Weekly Pro Wrestling magazine combined show at the Tokyo Dome.** Of all the accomplishments made by various promotions during the past year, the one with the highest degree of difficulty and greatest degree of improbability was the success of *Weekly Pro* magazine and its editor Tarzan Yamamoto to stage a mammoth spectacular with all of Japan's main promotions. Over 60,000 filled the Dome and paid in total over \$6 million in combined ticket revenue and souvenir sales. Not only did Yamamoto finesse all the major promotions to appear on his card, but each gave him their most prestigious main event match as well. It never happened before and it may never happen again.

2) **New Japan takes over ownership of the UWFI.** The seeds of this go way back since many of the wrestlers of the UWFI were trained and developed by New Japan. Just a year ago, the UWFI had four shows in the top ten of the year and were packing arenas for their monthly shows. In September, New Japan began the takeover and by year's end, the UWFI had ceased to exist as a separate group. Along the way, it provided New Japan with a \$6 million unexpected payday for their Oct. 9 Dome show and several other dates with crowds in excess of 10,000.

3) **New Japan sets records for attendance on two consecutive nights in North Korea.** On Apr. 28, New Japan shattered world attendance figures for professional wrestling with 150,000 at Mayday Stadium in North Korea. The new record was short-lived as the next day, Apr. 29, the North Koreans packed 190,000 into the same venue. While the shows were not great from an athletic standpoint, they stand alone in their record breaking crowds.

4) **Atsushi Onita retires on May 5.** After a one year long build-up, FMW mainstay and founder Atsushi Onita followed through on his promise and retired from wrestling after packing an FMW record 58,250 into Kawasaki Stadium to see him defeat a young flyer name Hayabusa in an exploding barbed wire cage death match. FMW was financially reorganized and continues with Hayabusa as its main draw doing nowhere near the business it did with Onita.

5) **Manami Toyota assumes near total domination of All Japan Women.** After years of pushing the big monsters like Bull Nakano and Aja Kong, AJW finally went to the one wrestler who is probably the best in the world today and just may be the best of all time—Manami Toyota. Not only did she win the WWWA Title on two occasions, but she also won the prestigious Grand Prix tournament and defeated the legendary Akira Hokuto at Budokan Hall. By year's end, she was a national celebrity.

Stories 6-10 (6) All Japan sells 16,300 seats in advance for each of its seven Budokan Hall shows and has a stellar main event and several match of the year contenders... (7) New Japan packs Sumo Hall for five nights for its August G-1 Climax tournament with Keiji Muto as the winner... (8) IWA Death Match Tournament draws 28,757 on Aug. 20 and sees a new king crowned in the person of Cactus Jack... (9) New Japan wrestler Hiroshi Hase wins election to the Japanese House of Councilors on July 23 and announces his upcoming retirement from wrestling... (10) Two of Japan's biggest promotions, New Japan and the All Japan Women are joined in marriage with the wedding of Kensuke Sasaki and Akira Hokuto on Oct. 1...

Best Japanese Matches from 1995

1/3: Takao & Kyoko Inoue beat Manami Toyota & Sakie Hasegawa to retain the tag titles (AJW, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

1/8: Terry Funk beat Cactus Jack in a barbed wire death match (IWA, Honjyo)

1/19: Toshiaki Kawada fought Kenta Kobashi to a 60 minute draw (IWA, Honjyo)

1/24: Mitsuharu Misawa & Kenta Kobashi fought Toshiaki Kawada & Akira Taue to a 60 minute draw (All Japan, Yamagata)

3/4: Misawa & Kobashi beat Steve Williams & Johnny Ace (All Japan, Tokyo Budokan Hall)

3/7: Hiroshi Ono & Shoji Nakamaki beat Cactus Jack & Leatherface in a 5,000 thumbtacks death match (IWA, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

3/17: Mayumi Ozaki beat Dynamite Kansai in a chain street fight (JWA, Hakata)

3/21: The Inoues beat Toyota & Blizzard Yuki (AJW, Osaka)

3/21: Kansai & Devil Masami & Hikari Fukuoka & Hiroumi Yagi beat Sumio Toyoma & Candy Okutsu & Cutie Suzuki & Mayumi Ozaki (JWA, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

3/26: Bull Nakano beat Kyoko Inoue to retain the title (AJW, Yokohama)

3/26: Manami Toyota beat Aja Kong to retain the WWWA Title (AJW, Yokohama)

3/26: Misawa beat Kobashi in a Carnival Tournament match (All Japan, Matsumoto)

4/2: Misawa & Kobashi & Stan Hansen fought Kawada & Taue & Johnny Ace to a 30 minute draw (All Japan, Tokyo Egg Dome)

4/2: Funk & Nakamaki & Leatherface beat Cactus Jack & The Head Hunters in a barbed wire baseball bat match (IWA, Tokyo Dome)

4/6: Misawa fought Kobashi to a 30 minute draw in a Carnival Tournament match (All Japan,

Okayama)

4/13: Kobashi fought Kawada to a 30 minute draw in a Carnival Tournament match (All Japan, Sendai)

4/15: Misawa beat Taue to win the Carnival Tournament (All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

4/16: Toyota & Hasegawa beat Kong & Kyoko Inoue (AJW, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

5/1: Head Hunter B beat Head Hunter A in a glass death match (IWA, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

5/5: Atsushi Onita beat Hayabusa in an exploding barbed wire cage match (FMW, Kawasaki Stadium)

5/7: Toyota fought K. Inoue to a 60 minute draw (AJW, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

6/9: Kawada & Taue beat Misawa & Kobashi to capture the tag titles (All Japan, Tokyo Budokan Hall)

6/14: Koji Kanemoto beat Sabu (New Japan, Tokyo Budokan Hall)

6/25: Black Tiger beat Koji Kanemoto (New Japan, Omori)

6/25: Masa Chono & Hiroshi Tenzan beat Rick & Scott Steiner to retain the tag titles (New Japan, Omori)

6/27: Hayabusa beat Hskatsu Oya to win the vacant Brass Knux Title (FMW, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

6/27: Kong beat Toyota (AJW, Sapporo)

7/7: Chris Benoit fought El Samurai to a 30 minute draw (New Japan, Iwanizawa)

7/7: Lion Heart (Chris Jericho) beat Ultimo Dragon (WAR, Tokyo Sumo Hall)

7/8: Misawa & Kobashi & Jun Akiyama beat Kawada & Kikuchi & Ogawa (All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

7/13: Chris Benoit beat Black Tiger in the semi-finals of the junior hvt. tournament (New Japan, Sapporo)

7/23: Toyota fought Mima Shimoda to a 30 minute draw (AJW, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

7/24: Misawa beat Kawada (All Japan, Tokyo Budokan Hall)

7/31: Toyota beat Toshiyo Yamada (All Japan Women, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

7/31: Kyoko Inoue beat Sakie Hasegawa (AJW, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

8/12: The Great Sasuke beat Super Delphin (Michinoku Pro, Yamagata)

8/14: Mita & Shimoda beat Hokuto & Asari (AJW, Sagami-hara)

8/15: Mito beat Hashimoto in the G1 Climax Tournament Finals (New Japan, Tokyo Sumo Hall)

8/20: Shoji Nakamaki beat Hiroshi Ono in a tournament death match (IWA, Kawasaki Stadium)

8/20: Cactus Jack beat Terry Funk in the death tournament finals (IWA, Kawasaki Stadium)

8/30: Dynamite Kansai beat Aja Kong to capture the WWWA Title (AJW, Osaka)

8/30: Takako & Kyoko Inoue beat Toyota & Hasegawa (AJW, Osaka)

9/2: T. Inoue & Yamada & T. Watanabe beat Yuki & Itoh & Yoshida (AJW, Osaka)

9/2: Toyota beat Hokuto in the Destiny Dream Match (AJW, Tokyo Budokan Hall)

9/3: Toyota beat Yumiko Hotta in the Grand Prix Finals (AJW, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

9/10: Misawa pinned Taue to retain the Triple Crown Title (All Japan, Tokyo Budokan Hall)

9/23: Tatsuo Nakano & Yoji Anjyo beat Choshu & Nagata (New Japan, Yokohama)

9/24: Hokuto & Shimoda beat The Inoues to capture the tag titles (AJW, Kawasaki)

9/25: Koji Kanemoto beat Chris Benoit (New Japan, Osaka)

9/30: Kawada & Taue & Izumida beat Misawa & Kobashi & Asako (All Japan, Tokyo Korakuen Hall)

10/15: Masami beat Fukuoka (JWP, Korakuen Hall)

10/15: Kawada & Taue fought Misawa & Kobashi to a 60 minute draw (All Japan, Nagoya)

10/25: Misawa beat Kobashi to retain the Triple Crown Title (All Japan, Budokan Hall)

10/25: Kawada beat Gary Albright (All Japan, Budokan Hall)

10/31: Masami & Fukuoka & Okutsu beat Suzuki & Ozaki & Yagi (JWP, Osaka)

10/31: Dynamite Kansai beat Takako Inoue to retain the title (JWP, Osaka)

11/18: Kawada & Taue fought Johnny Ace & The Patriot to a 30 minute draw (All Japan, Korakuen Hall)

11/21: Kawada & Taue beat Misawa & Kobashi (All Japan, Sapporo)

12/2: Kawada fought Kobashi to a 30 minute draw (All Japan, Niage)

12/4: Kyoko Inoue beat Aja Kong (AJW, Sumo Hall)

12/4: Toyota beat Dynamite Kansai to capture

ZAVISA'S TOP 25 FEMALE WRESTLERS

	1994	1993
1) Manami Toyota (AJW)	1	1
2) Kyoko Inoue (AJW)	2	3
3) Akira Hokuto (AJW)	3	2
4) Mima Shimoda (AJW)	6	13
5) Aja Kong (AJW)	5	16
6) Sakie Hasegawa (AJW)	12	8
7) Bull Nakano (AJW)	17	6
8) Hikari Fukuoka (JWP)	9	9
9) Toshiyo Yamada (AJW)	4	5
10) Etsuko Mita (AJW)	13	18
11) Yumiko Hotta (AJW)	8	15
12) Dynamite Kansai (JWP)	16	15
13) Mirko Yoshida (AJW)	16	12
14) Takao Inoue (AJW)	7	*
15) Mayumi Ozaki (JWP)	11	11
16) Candy Okutsu (JWP)	10	7
17) Tomoko Watanabe (AJW)	NR	NR
18) Jaguar Yokuto (AJW)	24	NR
19) Shinmoku Kandori (LLPW)	**	**
20) Bison Kimura (AJW)	**	**
21) Devil Masami (JWP)	15	4
22) Kauro Itoh (AJW)	23	20
23) Megumi Kudo (FMW)	21	NR
24) Hiromi Yagi (JWP)	NR	NR
25) Chaparita Asari (AJW)	20	24

* = Injured that year; ** = retired that year
NR = not rated that year

Based on a point system where the no. 1 wrestler gets 25 points, the no. 2 wrestlers gets 24 points, and so on, here are the rankings for the different promotions...

AJW	17 wrestlers/255 pts. (246 in 1994)
JWP	6 wrestlers/60 points (55 in 1994)
LLPW	1 wrestler/7 points (5 in 1994)
FMW	1 wrestler/3 points (5 in 1994)

the title (AJW, Sumo hall)

12/9: Misawa & Kobashi beat Kawada & Taue to win the tag tournament (All Japan, Budokan)

12/10: K. Inoue & T. Watanabe beat Toyota & Itoh in the tag tournament finals (AJW, Korakuen Hall)

12/11: Keiji Muto beat Shiro Koshinaka (New Japan, Osaka)

12/13: Rey Misterio Jr. beat Psicosis (Super J Cup Card, Sumo Hall)

12/13: Jushin Liger beat Ultimate Dragon (Super J Cup card, Sumo Hall)

12/21: Koji Nakagawa & Great Sasuke & Hayabusa beat Super Delphin & Taka Michinoku & Ricky Fuji (FMW, Yokohama)

12/24: Ozaki & Suzuki & Kansai beat Masami & Fukuoka & Yagi (JWP, Korakuen Hall)

12/30: Bull Nakano beat Akira Hokuto (Inoki Promotions, Osaka Castle Hall)

12/30: Yoji Anjyo beat Hiroshi Hase (Inoki Promotions, Osaka Castle Hall)

TORCH TALK SPECIAL

RINGMASTER STEVE AUSTIN

By Wade Keller

Steve Austin, 31, began wrestling at the end of 1989 in Dallas, Texas after growing up a fan of pro wrestling. In this "Torch Talk" interview conducted Dec. 14, 1995, he walks through his career step by step giving insight into his thoughts and motivations as he strived to make his living in wrestling and then feel professionally fulfilled.

Wade Keller: What are your first memories as a fan of professional wrestling?

Steve Austin: My first memories as a fan are sitting in my living room in Texas with my two brothers watching—I forget who it was, but somebody had the claw on Dusty Rhodes and he was bleeding all over the place and security guards were walking around the ring and we were yelling and screaming why the security guards weren't stopping them. That's one of my first memories. I don't remember how old I was. That was growing up watching Paul Boesch's Houston wrestling. I just remember always watching wrestling when it came on TV.

Keller: Was it something that someone else turned you on to or were just flipping channels and one day you saw it and liked it?

Austin: We were just flipping channels, me and my brothers, and watching all of the action back there. There wasn't a whole lot on TV back then anyway, so when wrestling came on in a small southern Texas town, it was pretty much a highlight of the night.

Keller: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Austin: (pause) Ahh, let me think. I had three brothers and one sister. They watched wrestling

a little bit. Everybody else kind of burned out on it and I was the only one who really kept watching it through grade school, high school, and college. No one in my family ever really cared about it. I pretty much made everybody watch it in the house as far as my brothers and sister were concerned. Only when I got involved in it did they start watching it again.

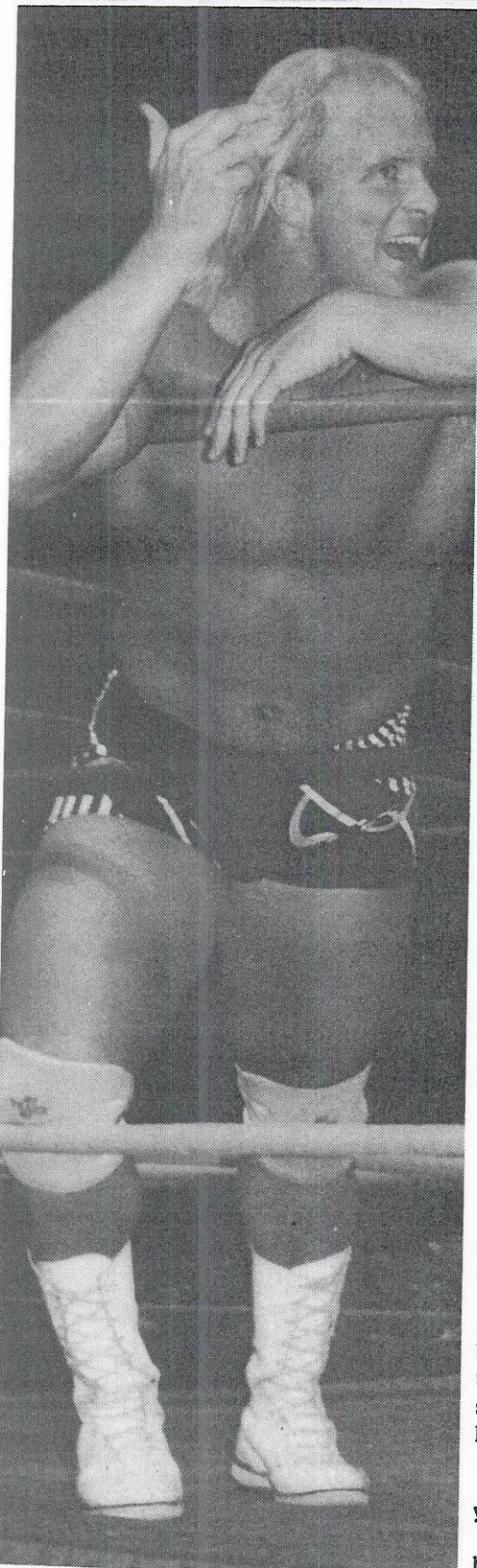
Keller: As you grew older, who were the wrestlers you grew to respect—not just like as a fan, but respected them?

Austin: I always liked Terry Funk, Dory Funk. Wahoo McDaniel was really big back then. Jose Lothario was really popular back then. Those were a few of them.

Keller: What aspect of professional wrestling made you a big fan? The actual wrestling? The personalities? Interviews?

Austin: Back then from when I first got really into wrestling, it wasn't so much the modern day promoting of it with so much show biz in it. Back then it was basically reality. It was a lot easier to believe and the age I was made it a lot easier to believe anyway. Just the product that they were putting out, everything seemed legitimate. The argument as whether it was real or fake was a hell of an argument back then because it was so real. I liked the style the guys wrestled back then and it wasn't overdone. Costuming and marketing is really important right now, but back then it wasn't. I just liked the matches, the style, and the feuds and the angles and the way everything was played out to be a really legit product.

Keller: Did you take part in other sports?



Austin: I ran track. I played baseball and football all through high school. I got a scholarship to play football at North Texas State University. After I finished my eligibility there on a scholarship, I paid for one semester there myself. I needed like 17 hours to get a degree in physical education and I just got burned out. I got a scholarship all through college and then I went to state a couple of times throwing a discus in high school. In high school football I was a running back. Then when I went to college I went as a linebacker and then my last two years at North Texas State I played defensive end.

Keller: At what point did it first hit you that you might want to go the route of being a pro wrestler?

Austin: When I really got hooked on weights in high school and was always in the gym training I guess I was okay size back then. I don't ever consider myself gigantic beyond any stretch of the imagination. Back then in the small town I was a pretty good size. People would come up to me and say, "Man, you ought to be a professional wrestler." And it turned into a thing to say for me, because I'd go, "Yeah, that's what I'm gonna do." I never really had my mind set on being a professional wrestler. I just looked at it as something to do. I finished my eligibility out of North Texas State and was working on a freight dock. My hair was getting pretty long and I had a little more of it back then than I do now.

I was still training really hard and weighing in at about 255. I just figured the next thing for me to do was being a wrestler. Even though I was close to having a degree in P.E. I really didn't see myself sitting in an office and doing the exact same thing in any type of environment every day. So that's when I said maybe I ought to give this thing a try and see how it goes.

Keller: Did you think becoming a professional wrestler was something you might try to do, but it would never really happen and you didn't know what steps to take? Or were you determined to make it happen?

Austin: At this age in college I'm watching this, still being a big fan, of course to a big degree a quote-unquote "mark." I knew something was behind it, but then again this was in Denton, Texas so of course I was going to the Dallas Sportatorium. So I'm watching all this action. When I got into it and watched it on TV or me and my friends would go down to the Sportatorium and watch the Von Erichs, things were pretty hot back then, I watched the action in the ring, I knew I could do it. Like I said, I was in great shape at the time. My brothers kind of egged me on a little bit, telling me I could do it.

I always knew that I could and when I first went to the wrestling school, the guys kept saying just because I was a football player

There was a time there where I ran out of tuna and all I ate for three days was raw potatoes. I would peel them with my pocket knife in my hotel room and I'd eat them for breakfast, lunch, and dinner until I got my next paycheck in. You definitely had to pay your dues.

didn't mean I was going to be successful because wrestling and football were two different things. I told the guy, "Listen, if you'll just show me how to do this, I can do it." So I went in with a positive attitude because I felt like in anything you do, if you don't have a positive attitude or if you believe you can't do something, well then you're not going to be able to. I was always confident I could do it.

Keller: How did you get into the training camp?

Austin: Chris Adams kept coming up to me for one of the school seminars. It was after a Saturday morning TV taping. He came out there and I was dressed up. I thought there were going to be a bunch of gigantic people there. As it turns out there were a bunch of scrubs standing in line and I dressed nice and was looking good and I was ready to try to impress somebody. We talked for a while. Throughout the seminar before the school where everybody would sign up, he kept reiterating, "Just because you're a football player doesn't necessarily mean you'll do well." I just let him know I did have some athletic ability and a brain in my head and given a chance I could learn how to do that.

Keller: So the seminar wasn't really a training camp?

Austin: No, they just had the advertisement on TV and it was, "Learn how to be a professional wrestler." The next sign up would be at a certain date. I went down to the morning TV taping and then after everybody filed out of the Sportatorium and all the guys were leaving, I was in line to listen to this guy talk about professional wrestling and what it was going to take, how much it was going to cost, how often we would be training.

Keller: How much did it cost and how often did you train?

Austin: Man, I can't remember how much I

paid. I didn't end up paying the full amount. We trained only one day a week on Sundays. There were probably 30 or 40 people in the class and I guess the class lasted two or three hours. The hands-on in-the-ring training was pretty limited, so basically you stood around and watched a lot.

Keller: When you went to the seminar the first time, did you pretty much have a feeling for how a match operated and how the business worked, or were you still not quite aware?

Austin: I was still not quite aware. I had never really talked to any of the wrestlers. I wasn't aware of someone calling a match or this or that. I pretty much knew something was rigged, but it still wasn't in black and white yet. It was grey. I didn't know much at all.

Keller: What surprised you the most when you started learning a lot about how things worked? Was there something that dropped your jaw?

Austin: Nothing that dropped my jaw, but just the initial things like something really simple, like communication in the ring—how big of a deal it seemed at the time where it might just be a three step movement, but it seemed like you were saying it over and over to yourself to try to remember it. If you look back, I mean, it was so simple and easy to do. But when you're nervous and you've got a crowd out there in front of you and you're trying to remember something, that seemed like a really big deal to me.

Keller: After you began going once per week, how did it progress from there to where you actually got some ring time?

Austin: At first all we did was learn how to fall correctly as far as falling flat, slapping the mat. It was similar to a martial arts or judo type fall for protection. There was nothing dramatic about it. It was all just designed to save your back and extend your career and your health. A little bit of tumbling and stuff like that. Actually, very little mat wrestling. Some reversals and counter moves and stuff like that, but I still don't know enough of those. I had probably been in the school for four or five months, but like I said when you're only going once a week, your time in the ring is pretty limited. It was about the five month mark when I had my first match. So basically it comes out to about 20, 25 lessons.

Keller: Did learning to be a wrestler come slower or easier than you thought it would?

Austin: In the beginning stages it kind of came slow to me I guess because I was nervous. I knew I could do it, but I didn't have enough repetition. Although I thought I could be successful at it, I wasn't getting the repetition I needed to have the confidence, so hell I don't know. Now it's easier to pick things up. But back then I would consider myself a slow learner.

Keller: Was there anything you were especially good at from the start?

Austin: A simple thing, just as far as hitting the ropes. Some of these guys were sitting around complaining and talking about their ribs hurting. It was unreal. Even though hitting the ropes sounds like a stupid thing, there are still a lot of guys who don't even hit the ropes right. I guess I was a natural as far as the movement in the ring. Being in front of the crowd didn't really bother me too much.

Keller: Who was your first match against?

Austin: Against Frogman LeBlanc in the Dallas Sportatorium.

Keller: Opening match?

Austin: It was the second or third match. We got this match down. This was right before we went out and I was a nervous wreck. I was pretty much the sh--s. I got my first win and it kind of went from there.

Keller: Why do you think you weren't nervous in front of the crowd?

Austin: I don't know. Just being in sports all my life, I guess the crowd isn't what makes you nervous. I guess there is a sense of being nervous about screwing up and not doing something right, but not nervous in the sense of being in front of people.

Keller: In your early matches did you sense that you and maybe others who you've run into who are new in the business were scared of being injured or is having a good match much more at the forefront?

Austin: I think having a good match. I'm never, ever concerned about being injured. I see a lot of guys kind of shy away from certain bumps or not wanting to hit the mat. But the people I was around were never really worried about being injured, although these days depending on what kind of match you're in you see guys kind of shying away from falls and stuff like that or not taking a good bump just because they are trying to protect themselves. But I think anyone who is breaking in is pretty much prone to go overboard and take crazy bumps like I did in the beginning. I thought that was how you impressed someone, by taking a stupid bump. I took my share of them, but these days I don't try to do anything unsafe.

Keller: When you began wrestling regularly in Dallas, how often were you wrestling a month?

Austin: When I first started and I just was breaking in, I would be wrestling a Friday night show and of course putting somebody over. Then on the Saturday morning show they'd beat me on TV. But they'd take care of me to a degree and try to give me something, but I was so green I didn't really understand a whole lot. And then still even though I was in the ring, I still hadn't been smartened up completely to

how everything worked, so I was doing a lot of the stuff on my own. So it would be just on Friday and Saturday. Then after about six or seven weeks that was when I asked Jerry Jarrett—who just came in with the Von Erichs and Jarrett was pretty much running things—I was still a babyface and I asked Jerry when I could be booked full time. He said, "I think you're ready now, Steve." So they sent me to Tennessee. I showed up as a babyface and worked there for another I guess six weeks and that's when I went back to Dallas and turned heel. When I went to Tennessee of course that was five or six days a week. But prior to that it was two days a week.

Keller: You said when you first started wrestling you weren't totally smartened up and you were doing things on your own?

Austin: Well, not wanting to step on anybody's toes and act like a know it all, I kept my ears and eyes open and my mouth shut. I didn't want to ask the wrong questions as far as, "Why did you do that?" or "What's going on?" or "What do you mean, the babyface has to look good and then the heel has to take over? How come you gotta do that?" It was a matter of how to work a match and why you did what you did. I didn't know what I could and couldn't do. I didn't want to piss people off. I had confidence I could learn this, but like I said when you're green and nobody's really helping you with the mental aspect of it, it's kind of scary.

Keller: When you were behind the scenes for the first time in Dallas and Memphis, what surprised you about the way the business operated behind the scenes? Not in the ring, but the dynamic of the locker room.

Austin: You had your guys who were on top and they pretty much had one mindset and were kind of lollygagging around. Of course, you are talking about guys like Kerry Von Erich and people like that who were stars. They came in and it was a very light-hearted approach for them. Kerry Von Erich was a big star. He was very comfortable with his success and what he could do in the ring. The promoting aspect of it was kind of weird because you'd see all the politics going on backstage, all the back-stabbing and people talking here and there. Nothing really surprised me, but it was kind of like a circus-type atmosphere where when you don't know anything, you see all this going on and you're trying to take it in, but you don't understand it so all you can do is observe. I didn't know what to think about it. I took it all in and tried to make sense of it as I went along.

Keller: What was it like working six or seven days a week on the road? Was atmosphere remarkably different there than in Dallas where you were only wrestling twice a week?

Austin: Yeah, it was different, but also

different in the respect that the Tennessee territory at that time was called the Nutra-System territory because everybody who went there lost weight. Times were kind of down. When I first went there it was right around Christmas time, a slow time for that area. It was great to be on the road every day and I had a blast. I mean, going out there and paying my dues. A lot of times at the hotel I was staying at I couldn't pay my weekly bill, so they just let me pay it off when I got the money.

There was one period of time there where I ran out of tuna fish and all I ate for three and a half days was raw potatoes. I would peel them with my pocket knife in my hotel room and I'd eat them for breakfast, lunch, and dinner until I got my next paycheck. You definitely had to pay your dues in that territory, but it was so fun just to be doing something like that, trying to make it, working every night and watching the guys out there in the ring who were accomplished wrestlers.

I'll never forget one of the first matches I had was a little spot show in Tennessee and Dutch Mantel was booking. I had a match with some masked guy, I can't even remember his name. We went out there for about ten minutes and I went over in the math. I thought I had done okay. When I walked back to the dressing room Dutch Mantel told me right there in my face, "What in the hell was that?" I said, "What's wrong?" He said, "That was the drizzlin' sh--s." I was speechless. I didn't know what to think. He said to Chris Champion, "Chris, come over here." He told me, "Put a headlock on Chris." He showed me how to do a headlock. I was killing the guy holding him down. He showed me how to do a headlock and he pointed out a chair. "See that chair right there? You get that chair and you take it to the door and you watch every one of these matches because that's the only way you're going to learn how to do this sh--." From that day forward to this day now, I watch just about every single match on the card. It was an eye-opening experience, but something I appreciated Dutch telling me.

Keller: In your first match, how much were you paid?

Austin: I got 40 dollars for the Dallas Sportatorium match.

Keller: And that was probably pretty good compared to Memphis?

Austin: Yeah. (laughs) It was about twice the money. I saw all these guys and I knew these guys weren't making gigantic bucks, but when I got the 40 dollars, since it was a TV match, I don't know what I was expecting, but it kind of crushed me when I only got 40 bucks. I was kind of upset. Of course I didn't say anything because I didn't know any better. I didn't know what the money was. But there were many days in the Tennessee territory when you're making 15 or 20 dollars a day. So the 40 bucks was a

I saw all these guys and knew they weren't making gigantic bucks, but when I got the 40 dollars, since it was a TV match, I don't know what I was expecting, but it kind of crushed me when I only got 40 bucks. I was kind of upset. Of course I didn't say anything because I didn't know any better. But there were many days when you're making 15 or 20 dollars, so 40 wasn't bad.

pretty good payoff.

Keller: Did you think when you were training and decided to get into wrestling that there would be a few years of just living hand to mouth or did you think right away you would be making 500 bucks a match?

Austin: (laughs) I guess I pretty much went into it blind and didn't know what to expect. When I left my job working on a freight dock, I was making 12 dollars an hour, 40 hours a week minimum so I was making good money doing that. I was offered a position to go into the office and eventually manage as part of a nation-wide company. It was a hell of an offer and a great opportunity. But I turned them down because I was in the wrestling school and I was going to do this thing.

Going into it I didn't expect to make big money right off, but when you're watching TV and you see the guys in the NWA and WWF, you knew they were making damn good money. I guess that's what I kind of looked forward to. Going into it I didn't know what to expect, but I guarantee when you get your first check and it doesn't even cover gas or lodging and really doesn't even cover your meals, it kind of wakes you up pretty quick.

Keller: When you first started wrestling regularly, how long of a time-table did you have in your mind that you thought it would take you to make good money with a national promotion?

Austin: I was getting a lot of feedback and a lot of help from guys like Billy Joe Travis and Gary Young. I always thought they were very

good workers, but never really got a big break, but at times had some good heat on them and were, in my opinion, very accomplished workers. With their help I thought I was coming along pretty good, so I didn't put a time frame on it. I just kept thinking if things keep going good... And every once in a while a guy would tell me, "You're gonna make it one of these days and you'll get into the NWA or the WWF." I kept listening to them tell me I was gonna make it. I didn't put a time frame on it, but I kept hoping the time would come. The second time I went into Tennessee, the second time around, Rod Price was supposed to come with me, but he was about to get married or something and chose not to come.

When I was living there working out of Nashville, Tennessee Grizzly Smith had called down there through Tom Prichard. I called him back and got the offer to go to WCW. This was probably right at almost a year and a half of wrestling. So a year and a half, in a way it seems like a long time, but compared to the dues a lot of people have paid before me, actually it was kind of quick. I consider a year and a half pretty fast to get a good break even though some people do it in one day or two weeks. I enjoyed paying my dues and I wouldn't do it any other way. I had a blast and met a lot of good people who helped me along the way.

Keller: What do you think was the key to you getting into WCW when you did? Recommendations from other people, your name value from publicity, word of mouth?

Austin: To tell you the truth, I think Grizzly had been hearing about me—I'm not sure how long the sheets have been around because I was only exposed to them a couple of years after I got to WCW, that's how much I kept to myself and didn't pay attention to what was going on. But Grizzly Smith had told me when I got up there he had been reading and hearing about me. Maybe it was from that. I know they pretty much didn't watch the USWA show, so it must have been word of mouth and the sheets spreading the word. I guess I got a good write-up or two for a couple of the matches I had with Chris Adams. I'm not saying they were barnburners, but we definitely had a couple of very good matches.

Keller: Did Chris Adams help you move to your next stages as a wrestler and in your career, or did he just train you and let you loose?

Austin: He trained me. I went through his school, and then we had the feud where it was student versus teacher. I came back from six weeks in Tennessee and I remember when Jerry (Jarrett) called me over on the road one day and said, "Steve, we're sending you back to Texas." My jaw almost fell open. I thought, "Man, I just got fired." I had been starving. I would sit up there and starve and I wasn't going to quit

because of money. So he said they were going to turn me heel against Chris. I said, "Oh, man, that's great." Because I was happy to just have a job.

I think what the deal was that helped me there, (Chris Adams) didn't help me get to the next step as far as calling around and trying to get me a job. But we had this feud that lasted six or eight months. In the Dallas area it was the best thing on the card. Every time he'd lead me through a match. The thing about Chris was, he knew that a babyface had to sell and he would sell his ass off. When it came time when the babyface needed to win, which is most of the time, he'd get the win. But I always got my heat back. He helped me with my interviews. Those were really bad back then, but still he'd give me interview time. Then he brought the girls in and all this other stuff. He always, always let us get the heat. That was what I think was the turning point. Back then it gave people something to really bite into. It was back in 1990 we got third in the PWI "Feud of the Year" type thing. For a small promotion and the guy had been in the business about four months, to be third in the feud of the year, it was a big deal to me and I think that got a lot of attention.

Keller: You began wrestling in 1989?

Austin: Yeah. I'll be 31 on December 18 and I started a little late. If I could do it over again, I don't think I would have played college football because all I got out of that was a torn up knee. Don't get me wrong. If I ever use the education, that's great, but I don't see myself using it in the near future.

Keller: When did you originally meet Jeanie Clark, your wife?

Austin: It was a month or two or three into the feud with Chris. That's when he brought her into it.

Keller: At what point did you two realize you would make a couple off-camera as well as be involved on-camera?

Austin: I guess it was a couple of months into the angle. We just went out to eat a couple of times after the matches and hell, basically it just happened from there. I guess it was about two or three months after I met her. At first I didn't even like her (chuckle), but I'll say that to anybody. Anybody who really knows me knows basically that anybody I end up liking I didn't like the first time I met them. I'm kind of strange in that respect. Hell, we've been together ever since.

Keller: Did the wrestling business provide the initial bond or did you share some other things in common and wrestling was sort of a coincidence more than anything?

Austin: Wrestling is what brought us together because I wouldn't have met her otherwise. She travelled on the road with me in WCW for a

When I first got into WCW I heard everybody bitching and complaining. I couldn't believe it. I came from a promotion where I wasn't making any money. I was saying to myself, what's wrong with these guys? They've got it made. This is WCW, this is the big time. Hell, a year and a half later I was one of the guys bitching and complaining.

while, too. But we got a lot in common. Now basically she doesn't hardly watch wrestling unless I'm on TV. I'm kind of glad—wait, I'm definitely glad that I met her. It gets to be a strain when you're travelling with your wife on the road because of all the situations and everything in wrestling.

Keller: What were the negotiations like when they were interested in bringing you in? Did they bring you in under their non-negotiable conditions?

Austin: I had been hearing about these WCW contracts and everything when I first was talking to WCW. But there was really no conversation. One day I flew in and met Dusty Rhodes and he said they wanted to use me as a heel and they gave me a starting date. I was just ready to come in. There was no discussion about money or what they were going to do with me. They said they wanted me as a heel, which was good because that was what I was doing. I just figured it was like 500 bucks a night or something like that. I didn't even know or care. Then all of a sudden at one of the TVs they handed me this stack of papers with a staple in it and it was a contract. It was a guaranteed 75,000 dollars a year contract. So for someone who was making 20 dollars a day to make 75 grand a year, I wasn't about to bitch and complain about that at all. I signed on the dotted line without any hesitation.

Keller: How would you describe your initial period in WCW? Disillusioned? pleasantly surprised? There must have been a difference in attitude among the wrestlers when they are where they want to be rather than striving to get somewhere.

Austin: Well, I don't know if this answers your question, but when I first got into WCW I

heard everybody bitching and complaining. I couldn't believe it. I came from a promotion where I wasn't making any money. I was saying to myself, what's wrong with these guys? They've got it made. This is World Championship Wrestling, this is the big time. Hell, a year and a half later I was one of the guys bitching and complaining along with everyone else. Not because of money, because the contract rolled over and I was making great money. At the time we worked hard for WCW because we were travelling a lot. The money was excellent. The strain was from all the b.s. and the politics, always being held down. It wasn't just me. It was a lot of the guys.

When you're in a place like the USWA, you weren't making any money but they were using you the best you could be used because they needed everything that they could get on a show to get wrestlers over so the guys could make money. So it seemed at the smaller level you're happier and don't have as much to worry about. Of course, don't get me wrong, everybody wants to make the big money. But when you have a chance to make the big money and you're held down, that's when the frustration sets in.

Keller: Because it goes from wanting to make good money and make the big leagues to wanting to practice your art or your skill or your trade and get better at it?

Austin: Yeah, you want to make a lot of money, but you want to be on top of your promotion, too.

Keller: When you first got there and you were a heel, what did you think of the way you were being pushed and the way your character development was being handled? Were you happy and thought it was going well at first?

Austin: I never did even think about that back then because I never thought about character development or what I was supposed to be. I was "Stunning" Steve Austin. The only reason I got that name was because Dutch Mantel gave me the name Steve Austin five minutes before my first match in Memphis, Tenn. One day we were riding down the road, he said if you ever turn heel, you can be cocky and arrogant and call yourself "Stunning" Steve Austin. And that's where all that came from. It was like a mindset thing, just like the Hollywood Blondes were. Me and Brian weren't a glitz and glamour thing, it was just a sarcastic, in-your-face type thing and that's all "Stunning" Steve Austin was supposed to be. But there I was wearing this rag-tag outfit. I never have been known for a fancy wardrobe. I was supposed to be "Stunning" Steve Austin, so the name was kind of misleading and it surely wasn't what I was trying to be.

I was just trying to be an aggressive, hard-working heel. At the timeframe when I

was working, being a year and a half in the business when I went to WCW, all I was doing was trying to learn everything in the ring. The last thing I was trying to even think about was what kind of a gimmick I was trying to be or what my character was supposed to be. That was the furthest thing from my mind. I really couldn't say if it was the right thing to do or not because I wasn't even paying attention to it. But they put the TV Title on me right off the bat, so I was definitely happy with that.

Keller: Given that the guaranteed contracts they handed out to guys like you when you first came in were signed without you having to ask for it or fight for it, did that turn into a negative because you didn't have to think: What will draw money? How should I project myself to get the most fan heat and develop the character in the best way?

Austin: You didn't have to think in those terms because what you did didn't directly affect what you got paid. But I wasn't thinking about it not because I didn't have to or because I was on a guaranteed salary. I didn't think about it because I was completely ignorant to it. After a year and a half in the business, maybe I should have been smarter than that, but that was the furthest thing from my mind. Whenever I had the run with Steamboat I started opening my eyes. I'd ask Ricky, "What do you think I should do?" and "What do you think I'm doing wrong?" or "What should I do to make this more of a character or to get more crowd involvement?" We were having good matches, but I finally realized there was an element missing. I guess that was what I was trying to get at. But it took a while for me to realize that was what I needed.

Keller: Do you think had you not been given a guaranteed contract but were paid based on the gate that you would have sooner come to the realization of the importance of how to build fan interest month after month in your matches and your character? Or would you have been ignorant to that aspect of the business at that point anyway?

Austin: I don't know. That's a tough question. Of course you're gonna want to do everything you can to make yourself a well-rounded act. Then if you're being paid on that basis you'll do whatever you can to get the most money. But then again when you're thinking you hadn't been working even a year and a half, it took guys five, six, seven years to get a hell of a push back in the older days, so not necessarily was I out of touch, but World Championship Wrestling being what it was supposed to be, you should have had some idea from guys who had been in the business 15, 20 years who were running things. Maybe they should have come up to me and said, "Hey, why don't we do this?" So I wouldn't put all the blame or fault on myself. There was no direction at all from them trying to get me to develop.

Keller: Were there wrestlers, maybe Rick Steamboat was one of them, who took an active role behind the scenes in trying to contributing at least some of what you said was missing into the formula, that being advising younger workers? Or were the veterans just there to collect their money and go through the motions?

Austin: Yeah, pretty much just collect their money and go through the motions. It wasn't like Ricky volunteered this. I mean, I asked him because I have total respect for Ricky. I asked him just because I knew if he gave me an answer it would be the truth. That's why I asked him. Yeah, I started coming to the realization that maybe I needed to add something.

Keller: Were there any wrestlers behind the scenes who you asked questions of but who didn't really have much interest in answering them? It just wasn't something they had time for?

Austin: Hmmm. No, I'd have to say pretty much everybody seemed to help. That can be kind of misleading, because I didn't usually ask anybody for help. I just kind of watched. A lot of times guys would offer something and go out of their way to help people. Sometimes when you ask a question, for someone whose competing with you, they're not necessarily going to give you the right answer. You might think that they are, but they're not. You've gotta watch who you ask those questions of.

Keller: You said you watched matches, more than the typical wrestlers did?

Austin: Every one that I could.

Keller: What wrestlers do you remember watching and learning from more than most other wrestlers?

Austin: From the Dallas area it would have to be Gary Young and Billy Joe Travis just because they always seemed to have such great chemistry together and have these good matches. Of course, Lawler when he came to town. There were a couple of other guys who came through there.

As far as WCW, you could always watch Ric Flair and Rick Steamboat. When Barry Windham was there, I watched him. It wasn't necessarily always the big names on the card, it was watching everybody. Just because somebody might have been on the third match didn't mean they didn't have one or two things that they did outstanding, be it the way they sold something or something they did. You could learn from anybody on the card. You could also watch guys who had the crowd and then lost them and learn what you shouldn't do. It was basically watching everybody and learning from everybody, whether it was good or bad.

Keller: Let's move that question to the next level. When you're sitting there watching the match and you say you learn from someone,

Dusty Rhodes was booker and I was just supposed to get a big singles push and supposedly they were going to really light a fire under me. Well, I showed up in Columbus and Brian came up to me and said, "Hey, we're a tag team now. We need to think of a finishing move." I looked at him kind of strange and said, "What?" He goes, "Yeah." I was just going crazy inside.

it's hard for me, not having been in that position, to pick up on what you as a wrestler would actually learn from watching a match. I know what I look for, but what does a wrestler specifically learn from watching matches? Was it a series of spots that you wanted to replicate? Was it a way somebody took a bump, how they countered a move, how they interacted with the crowd? What specifically added to your ability to be a better worker?

Austin: I wasn't looking to take anybody's highspots and go back out and duplicate them. What I was doing was when someone did something, did it have any meaning and if it did have meaning, why did it mean something? If you saw somebody go out there and do almost the same match but just going out there and doing highspots for no reason whatsoever, the crowd kind of sits on their hands, that's not good. The whole reason behind having a match is the psychology involved. The thing I learned from almost everybody other than the way a certain guy sold this or that was the psychology behind everyone's match—what kind of match they were having, what kind of hold they were working, did they go back to the hold? If a guy was in a hold, was he fighting to get out or just laying there and it was becoming a rest hold. There should never be a rest hold. Everything should be a work hold. When you get blown up it becomes a rest hold. When you have a guy fighting for his life and trying to get out of a hold and then he finally does and that heel gets back in it and they go into a highspot and the babyface comes out on top and the heel shuts him back down, when there's a reason for something, and then something happens, that's when the crowd reacts. That's the way I get it.

Just going out there and watching why guys did something and when they did it.

Keller: What about interviews? Was that something you put a lot of thought into early on? Or only when you got WCW?

Austin: I've watched a lot of my earlier interviews and they're pretty horrifying. I didn't have a clue. Back then I didn't have anybody to help, no one whatsoever. And there was only the odd interview here or there anyway. It wasn't like I was comfortable behind the mic, much less having anything to talk about. So only right before they started shutting me down at WCW starting out with the Hollywood Blondes thing with Brian did I begin to get more comfortable behind the mic and then more comfortable on my own when they split me and Brian. Then in my short run in ECW I had the mic to myself and knew what I was trying to be and get across. To answer your question, when they put me and Brian together, that's when I really started to think about interviews.

Keller: Let's backtrack to the Dangerous Alliance. When did that first get proposed to you and what was your opinion of developing kind of a post-Four Horsemen heel group?

Austin: With the guys WCW wanted in that Dangerous Alliance, if you're associated with Bobby Eaton, Rick Rude, Arn Anderson, and Larry Zbyszko, plus Paul E. Dangerously, hell, what's there to be mad about? I was really happy with that arrangement. The War Games we had there in '92 was an excellent match. I was thrilled to be out there with those guys because I had such great respect for all of them involved. I'm not just kissing up to them, I really liked everybody in there. I liked the type of work they did. I didn't have any argument about it whatsoever. I thought they could have kept us going and put more heat on us and made it a better thing than they did, but that's just the way WCW does things. They shut that down prematurely just like they usually do.

Keller: What led to the break-up of the Dangerous Alliance?

Austin: I really couldn't tell ya'. That was before I really started taking notice as far as what's going on where and getting involved in the politics and everything like that. All of a sudden all I remember is we were told they were breaking us up.

Keller: What did you think of Paul E. Dangerously at that time?

Austin: I liked him. I always got along with Paul. Very smart and very creative. A little hyper, but I always got along with Paul from day one. I still get along with him. I think he's very smart. Back then I thought he was very smart and I always listen to him when he talks because he was a natural behind the microphone and still is.

Keller: Did you sense other wrestlers looked at Paul E. and didn't have respect for what you just described?

Austin: I guess if you had someone who was in the business two or three times longer than him and thought he was just a loud-mouth, basically a kid, maybe they would have thought about that. But I think anybody who has a head on their shoulders whether they had been in the business one year or twenty years could recognize that Paul E. was a damn good talker and really thought things out a lot more than people thought he did.

Keller: Did he help you with interviews? Did he sit down and say, "This is what we want to get across?"

Austin: You know, he did a little bit in the beginning, but not really so much like he did with ECW and the way he helped me out there. He tried a little bit (in WCW). Then again I really don't think we understood our roles with each other that well because it started getting to the point where I didn't want him to take all the interview time, but then again he was such a good talker and I didn't really feel like I had anything to say. He tried to help me, but not really a whole lot. I'm not putting any blame on him, though. It was just the way it was.

Keller: How did it come about that you teamed with Pillman?

Austin: Me and Brian were barely acquaintances before we got put together. I had had a couple of matches with Brian when he was a babyface and we had a couple of excellent matches out on the road. As far as I was concerned, Brian was just another wrestler. I thought he was an extremely talented one, but beyond that I definitely didn't want to be in a tag team with him. What happened was we went down to Columbus, Georgia for a TV taping and I was on my own and Dusty Rhodes was booker and Bill Watts was in at the time (as V.P.). I was just supposed to get a big singles push with Harley Race as my manager and supposedly they were going to really light a fire under me. Well, I showed up in Columbus and Brian came up to me and said, "Hey, we're a tag team now. We need to think of a finishing move." I looked at him kind of strange and said, "What?" He goes, "Yeah."

So I went in and talked to Dusty and he said, "Yeah, baby, that's what we're gonna do?" I said, "What about my singles push with Harley (Race) as my manager?" He said, "Well, we're gonna change all that." Bill Watts wanted a bumping heel tag team. So, man, I was just going crazy inside and I didn't know what to think. So Brian and I go out there and we have a couple of matches and I've got these stupid looking blue and black trunks out there and he's got those Cincinnati Bengals things. And we started talking and we started riding together. Raven or Johnny Polo or Scotty the Body or

Flamingo or whatever you wanted to call him, he would ride in the car with us, too. We were kind of a little travelling group there. So we started talking about what we should become. We gotta have a name. Every good tag team has a name. You can't just be Steve Austin & Brian Pillman.

I guess it had been done before but not really on a national level, and we just liked "The Hollywood Blondes." We put the whole thing together ourselves in terms of the wardrobe, the look, the style, we weren't together that long and we never even got a green light push, but me and Brian came up with this thing on our own. From then on me and Brian, even though they broke us up, and it was a real stupid move on WCW's part, we became really good friends and we're still very good friends.

Keller: What was it like working with Dusty Rhodes as your boss? Was it frustrating? Or did you have tremendous respect for his wrestling mind? Or did he seem disorganized or erratic?

Austin: At first I was impressed with Dusty. But then I started seeing through all the stupid stories and how me made everything sound like a million bucks. He was always skirting around the issue, never giving you a straight answer. And then the big kicker was he was the one who wanted to break Brian and me up. He was the one, I still believe, who convinced Eric that we should break up and I was going to be a singles star. I don't know why he did it, but it really pissed me off because me and Brian hadn't even scratched the surface. They hadn't even done any of the ideas that me and Brian came up with and the ones that they did do were so hot-shot and done so quickly that people never really had a chance to bite into anything we were doing as compared to what they could have.

I really enjoyed watching Dusty Rhodes the American Dream when he was in his prime, but when he was the booker and broke us up for no reason with all the B.S. that was going on in WCW, I wasn't impressed to say the least.

Keller: From having worked with Dusty over the years, what do you think is his motivation to continue to be in a leadership position, but then not exactly act like a leader?

Austin: I thought he was trying to get in and be a producer or director in Hollywood. I don't know what his motivation was or is because when you have a tag team like me and Brian and you just want to break it up for the hell of it for no reason in three stupid TV tapings, that doesn't show me much intelligence at all. I don't know what his motivation was.

Keller: Did other guys understand and respect what he was trying to do?

Austin: Some of the guys did, those who were

quote-unquote "his guys"—the guys he wanted to push. The thing with me and Brian, we were supposed to be an interim tag team to help switch the belts around, but we came up with the Hollywood Blondes thing. Maybe because it wasn't his idea he didn't want to use us right. For a brief period of time he really catered to Rick Rude. He did some good stuff with Rude and he did some good stuff with Vader and then in the long run he ended up not doing much with anybody. Again, going back to the same thing, I don't know what to think of Dusty Rhodes as a booker.

Keller: What was it like being in tag team matches for the first time consistently?

Austin: At first I hated it. I had never really been a fan of being in a tag team. But then after me and Brian started jelling together and started to click as a team, well then I loved it. I could go out there and some of the house shows we had at some of the small towns, I mean, we always worked our asses off. There were times when someone wouldn't show up and either Brian or I would have a singles match as a prelim match then come back and work the main event against Steamboat & (Shane) Douglas. It was a lot of fun because you could go out there and bust your ass for a couple of minutes and then take a breather on the ropes while the other guy was in there doing work. I would see which direction he was going or he'd see which direction I was going and we'd try to flow in one direction. After Brian and I got together, when we turned our tag team into the Blondes, I loved tag team wrestling.

Keller: When the team was broken up, it seemed at least as if you had the beginning of a pretty good run as a singles wrestler. You were pushed as a heel, but not at the rate that seemed you should have.

Austin: Hell no. It didn't even turn out to be a push. All it was in my mind was a ploy so I would be able to say okay to being broken up with Brian. I always wanted to be pushed as a singles wrestler. The fact of the matter was Brian and I turned our tag team into a hell of a deal. I mean, you had everything—marketing potential, you had someone who could get heat and could sell tickets and sell TV ratings. And they broke us up. They promised me all this stuff as a singles, so I didn't want to alienate Brian like that. But when the company is sending out the paychecks, sometimes you can stand up and sometimes you can't.

The push never came as a singles. It was stupid with the two-out-of-three falls thing with Dustin. It was a lame match. And a lame win the way it was done. I had been in tag team wrestling there for several months. I know some people can go from being in a tag team to being a singles wrestler and they can click just fine doing either one. In my mind, I get in a mindset where I'm either thinking about tag matches or

It seemed like Flair was always really cool, one of the guys and was always palling around and times were good when he wasn't the booker. When he got the book it seemed like he just completely changed. I'd always hear, "Awe, Steve, I'm one of your biggest fans." Well, if he was one of my biggest fans, I believe he could have taken a little more time to come up with a hell of lot better storylines for me than he did.

singles matches. If you take me straight out of a tag and throw me in a singles match and tell me I'm gonna be the champion, well I need to go a little slower at first until I get my gears back thinking in that mode. It was flat in that respect and even though I was the number one contender for nine or ten months, for however long I had the U.S. Title, they never made anything of it. They never gave me any interview time and never pushed me as a legitimate threat to win a world title.

Keller: It seems fans, especially those not privy to the inside-workings, have been conditioned to think that wrestlers want title belts and that's really important. Was it really important for you to have a title belt because of the belt itself? Not because it was symbolic of you getting a push and top money, but did actually being able to wear a belt and say you were a champion mean anything to you? Or because matches are worked, it really was just extra luggage?

Austin: It does mean something to a degree because even though it's a work, if they're thinking of putting the belt on you, even though in a shoot you didn't win the belt, that's the promotion rewarding you with the position. It does mean something. Then again, it doesn't. It all depends on what kind of money you're making. It's nice to say you'd had a belt and done this or that from the mark aspect of it, but I don't thrive on having to have a belt. But when you get a chance to be the guy who gets to try to draw money and have that responsibility handed to you, I think it's important and probably I'd venture to say everyone in wrestling would like

to have a belt at one time or another. It's good to have that kind of responsibility given to you.

Keller: Upon entering WCW you worked with Bobby Eaton and Dustin Rhodes. Eaton is considered a really, really good well-rounded highly-respected wrestler. Dustin at the time was considered similar to you, this up and coming quickly improving highly energized worker. That said, what is the difference between wrestling someone like Eaton who has so much experience as opposed to Dustin who was younger and in a different position in his career?

Austin: I agree 100 percent with your assessments of them. The difference between working with them was when I was working with Bobby, I mean there's a guy who has way more experience than me. I wanted Bobby to call the match because I could learn from him. Bobby's such a nice guy he would even let me call the match. That's a credit to him. I really appreciated that. But like I said I'd just as soon him call it so I could see what's going on inside of his head.

The matches I had with Dustin were easier for me because when I went out there with Dustin we knocked each other's heads off. I knew he had only been working a year longer than me so I knew I wasn't stepping on his toes in any way, shape, or form, so I felt a little more at ease to call anything I wanted and a little more at ease pounding him because he would pound me back. That's not to say Bobby Eaton isn't tough, I just didn't out of respect want to be too damn smug or whatever. Bobby's as tough as they come. With Dustin out there being about the same time in the business as I had been, I felt a lot more at ease with doing anything I wanted to.

Keller: How did Ric Flair as booker contrast with Dusty Rhodes in that position?

Austin: It seemed like Flair was always really cool, one of the guys and was always palling around and times were good when he wasn't the booker. When he got the book it seemed like he just completely changed. To me it wasn't a good situation because there was your lead heel having the control. I was a guy who, even though I hadn't been used the best, was up and coming and could definitely be somebody. And he's got the book, he's got the power to come up with something and he's not doing it. I'd always hear, "Awe, Steve, I'm one of your biggest fans." Well, if he was one of my biggest fans, I believe he could have taken a little more time to come up with a hell of lot better storylines for me than he did, which weren't really anything at all. To cover the other tracks, if he didn't think anything of me to begin with, why did he make such a big deal like he did. It was a pretty weird deal there.

I really just think it's hard anytime you've got your lead heel or your lead babyface or anybody

on the crew with the book, they're going to over-involve themselves. Bottom line is Ric is in the best cardiovascular shape of any guy in the business. He can still go as good as anybody can. But the bottom line, the truth of the matter is he is getting older. If you don't want to fade yourself out, at least feature a younger guy like he's coming up. Other than Alex Wright, who's a good kid, but he's still a kid, you've gotta have somebody who can have matches with him and he's beaten everybody in the damn territory, so who's your lead heel going to be? Flair was booking everything around himself and not building anybody else.

Keller: How about in terms of taking a wrestler to the side and saying, "Here's what we want to do with your character over the next six weeks" or "Here's what we're doing with this angle"—did Flair's approach and Dusty's approach differ greatly in how they communicated their plans?

Austin: No, not really. They might tell you a little story about going this direction or that. It would sound like a million bucks, so I guess they basically did come off the same. They'd tell you a story that would sound like a million bucks and then none of it would happen. I guess they operated pretty much the same.

Keller: It sounds like you're saying both Dusty and Flair were disingenuous?

Austin: Yeah, that's a good word for them.

Keller: How about the level above the booker—Jim Herd, Kip Frey, Bill Watts, Eric Bischoff? You were around most of them. Start with giving your impression of Herd.

Austin: That was before I started paying attention to the politics. I really didn't know enough about him to make an opinion of him.

Kip Frey was a guy who really didn't know what was going on. Bill Watts was someone who knew what was going on and was trying to go about getting things going in the right direction but I think he went overboard in pushing (his son) Erik. Erik's a really good kid, but Bill went overboard. Bill didn't have really good office politics either. He was somebody who wanted to be completely in control. Bill Watts was a very smart person with good ideas, I just think he went about implementing them in the wrong way, maybe.

Keller: Had TBS stuck with Bill and maybe found a way to work with him and work with his strengths rather than be so offended by his approach, would WCW have been better off or when he left was it pretty much time for him to leave?

Austin: Well, that's a tough call. You could go either way there. I couldn't really say. The deal was with the way he was pushing his son so strong, it really had everybody so pissed off that it wasn't a real good atmosphere. But I really can't say either way whether it would have been

good or bad if he stayed.

Keller: Did you sense Erik Watts was uncomfortable with being pushed so hard? How did he handle being the daddy's boy in the promotion without the credentials or the resume to back it up?

Austin: He took it all in stride. Of course he took a lot of ribbing and pretty much knew that if he walked around the corner and two guys were talking, they were probably talking about him, but I mean he always had a great attitude and worked his ass off and tried to learn. He did the best he could. He just had a lot of things going against him when his dad tried to push him so hard. I'm sure he was uncomfortable with it, but what's he gonna say? He'd rather be pushed than be crapped on. When your dad's doing something I guess being he's Bill Watts you really don't try to question him. Erik did the best he could.

Keller: If a wrestlers' union had formed during your first few years in WCW, who would have ended up being the leader as voted by the fellow wrestlers?

Austin: Hmmm. (laughs) I don't really know. I don't want to put a finger on a guy. If he's still there they'd probably fire him. Actually, I'm not trying to dodge the question, but I don't have a clue.

Keller: So there was nobody in the locker room who represented the voice of the locker room, speaking up on behalf of the wrestlers and got the wrestlers together to go in a direction that was best for the wrestlers? There wasn't a unity but instead there were a lot of factions?

Austin: Well, there's guys making different levels of money. The guys making a ton of money, who you would figure would have the most clout as far as trying to get something done, they're not going to say anything because they're making such good money. Maybe things weren't going in the right direction, but the guys who were making the money weren't going to say anything because they didn't want to jeopardize themselves. The guys who weren't making the money didn't want to say anything because they were scared they were gonna get fired anyway. There are so many different levels. I don't know. Everybody always had ideas and there were different guys rumbling about this or that, but the bottom line is when you talk about forming a union, what it all comes down to, you're in there for yourself and everybody gets sh--canned, if you're going along with everybody else on a decision and you really only did it because it was the majority instead of making your own decision, well you pretty much know you screwed yourself. So you've gotta be out for yourself.

Keller: On that note, Sting's been there almost forever. When you think of WCW over

the years consistently you think of Ric Flair and Sting. We talked about Flair already. What about Sting? Did he just have his group and do his thing and collect his big paychecks and play his role in the ring and that was the extent of his role, or was he sometimes a rallying point for things behind the scenes?

Austin: I wouldn't say a rallying point for anything behind the scenes, and I don't even know Sting all that well, but whoever he worked with he's always worked his ass off. He may be a little overexposed right now just because he's been there for a while and he is the anchor of the babyface side. He always looks good, he's always in good shape, he wears good outfits. To me it doesn't matter if he's making good money or bad money or more than anybody else, to me it seems he's always lived up to his end of the contract and worked his ass off, so I think he's done extremely well. He's been there a while. Maybe something could be done to make him fresher, but Sting has had good matches with everybody he's been put with. He carries his end of the match.

Keller: When you worked with Sting, what made him stand out among the wrestlers?

Austin: Even though he's been on TV longer than I, he was always extremely open to every one of my ideas. He would throw stuff in there to make something better and give some ideas about what he would do in a certain situation or not do. Nothing really stands out. He never blows up and he's always in great shape. I always enjoyed working with Sting, especially in Germany where the people were really into him.

Keller: Let's talk about being in the ring with Flair. How many times did you wrestle him?

Austin: I wrestled Flair a couple of times. Me and Brian had a tag match with him and Steamboat at the Royal Albert Hall in London. That was a hell of a match. He's got one of the best cardiovascular systems ever. He never gets tired. When you're in the ring with him it's fun. He was another one of the guys I was kind of careful working with because I didn't want to step on his toes. He's Ric Flair. Some guys, when you work with them, you're maybe not thinking as quick as you would with someone else because you're kind of second guessing yourself because you don't want to screw up what they're doing. I don't know if that sounds right, but I always enjoyed working with Ric. You always had a hell of a match and you always knew he was gonna work his ass off. I have nothing bad to say about what he does in the ring.

Keller: You worked with Flair when you were a heel and he was a babyface. Same with Rick Steamboat. What do Flair and Steamboat do differently as babyfaces? They

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are two of the top wrestlers of the last 20 years and having been in matches with both, what stood out as the contrasts between them? What makes them click?

Austin: They clicked because they're both so good. Steamboat is in every bit as good a shape as Flair is cardiovascular-wise. Steamboat was a consummate seller. Flair could sell, but Steamboat could sell his ass off. They both had great fire and they did so many things alike. Flair was more one-dimensional. He didn't have as much offense whereas Steamboat would armdrag and dropkick and a lot more stuff, whereas Flair just had his stuff. But he could light up the crowd and your chest with his chops. He'd do the chops and he'd drop the knee, but he didn't do a whole lot of things compared to what Steamboat did, but the way he did them and when he did them always meant something.

I just remember that night at Royal Albert Hall. Me and Brian (Pillman) were almost blown sky high because it was a shoot—we had the heat on Ric. It's basically a shoot, him fighting for the tag. And that's why the people got into the match so big because how many times do you watch a tag match when a guy's out there and they're getting heat on him, but he's not trying to go for the tag? But Ric was actually fighting for the tag. We had to maul him one time. Both Brian and I got him and the place just went unglued because Brian and I were keeping Ric from tagging.

They both do things different, but they're both so good in terms of psychology and their knowledge of listening to the crowd and doing it so many times, it's a real experience to work with people like them.

Keller: You've heard for many years and saw first hand that Flair and Steamboat have been two of the best in the business for years. Now, you got in the ring with them and worked with them, the match is over, and you're sitting back—name one thing about each of them that was a little bit of a let down.

Austin: (pause) I can't think of anything I would ever say was a letdown with Steamboat except for the fact that when he was making his comeback, I wanted him to actually kick my ass a little more than he did as far as laying his offense in. That's not a letdown. That's a nit-picking thing if that's the only thing I can think of. He was a little too light in his comeback.

As far as Flair, I was a heel and he was a babyface. I saw him tear down the house with how many other wrestlers? I thought maybe—well, we had good matches, but we could have done a little more in terms of the match, variety, false finishes, etcetera. With him it was pretty much a heel-babyface match, go out there for 15 minutes and that was about it. Basically it seemed he was holding back a little bit.

Keller: Shifting gears to the modern era of WCW. First of all, Eric Bischoff. Put aside the circumstances of your firing and put aside what you've said on ECW TV. Before you formed a solid opinion about him personally, professionally what was it like working for him compared to Bill Watts, Kip Frey, and in retrospect Jim Herd?

Austin: Well, I didn't pay attention to Herd. Watts was a take-control guy and he'd let you know what was going on, why it was going on, and this is how it's going to be. With Eric, when I first started dealing with him and when I think Dusty convinced him to break Brian and me up, I wonder why he went for that. He had to know Brian and I were the best thing to come along in a hell of a long time. Why would he allow that to happen? I don't understand. I guess when he first got the job he was kind of naive. I'm sure he would be. He was an announcer and then here he is running a wrestling company. You've got talkers like Dusty Rhodes coming in there saying they've got these million dollar ideas that don't pan out. Dusty can sell you a '76 Ford Pinto with a blown up motor but make it sound like a Lamborghini. So I think that kind of surprised Eric, or maybe he's learned from that. Like I said, barring the opinions I've formed, I do think he's caught on to that job extremely well. I'm not gonna say I agree with every decision he's making with Hogan and everything else like that, but he's obviously learned a hell of a lot and has kept his head and WCW above water. So I can't fault him for any of that.

Keller: When he first got the job, were wrestlers kind of surprised? "Geez, this was the C-level announcer and now he's our boss?" Or were wrestlers not surprised at all

that he climbed the ladder?

Austin: More power to him that he climbed the ladder, but I didn't necessarily understand why they hired him. I guess if I didn't understand it I guess a lot of people didn't understand it.

Keller: When rumors started that WCW was going after Hulk Hogan, I'm sure a lot of people thought, Yeah right. Hulk Hogan, Vince McMahon, and Titan Sports were so synonymous, it seemed unlikely. When you first heard the rumors did you think it could be great for WCW?

Austin: No. As a matter of fact, I was one of the skeptics. That was the time when they had the bonus deal on pay-per-views. As far as one of the so-called perks of the contracts, there would be a pay-per-view bonus because Hogan was coming aboard. I was one of the guys who didn't necessarily want that unguaranteed pay-per-view bonus because I didn't think Hogan was gonna be worth a damn after all the stuff he had done, said, and the lies on TV and all the other horsesh-- he was involved in. I was one of the biggest skeptics there was at WCW.

Keller: Explain the bonus pay-per-view system?

Austin: It was bonuses other guys were gonna get because Hogan was on the card, because of the increased buyrate.

Keller: Some guys thought they'd end up getting more money because Hogan would increase the buyrates?

Austin: Yeah, when the buyrates went over a certain level, that's when they had the bonus dollars that they'd spread out to the other guys. I went for a different deal, I structured my contract differently.

Keller: When Hogan arrived, were you and a lot of the guys in awe of who Hulk Hogan was or was it sort of like Hogan was old news and he was intruding on the new generation and raining on your parade by trying to take it over?

Austin: No, I wasn't in awe of him. And like I said, I was a skeptic of him coming in and drawing houses, but I didn't hate the guy just out of spite. I didn't know what he was gonna be like. I just didn't feel like taking the pay-per-view bonuses. But after I met him, we were on our way to Germany for the Germany tour and he was out drinking beer with us and everything was cool. I don't believe anybody was in awe of him. I thought it was cool to have him aboard. If they were gonna bring him aboard, I thought it was fine.

Keller: Did he have any kind of a chip on his shoulder that set anybody back, or did he fit in as one of the boys right away?

Austin: He tried to fit in as one of the boys. Whether you like him or not, he's Hulk Hogan. He's probably made more money in the

business than anybody else has. He's extremely successful. I would never take that away from him. I think it's fantastic everything that he's done and all the success that he's had. He tried hard to just be Hulk Hogan and be one of the guys.

Keller: How about the acquisition of Randy Savage? When that happened, did the morale in WCW go up because the thought was WCW was making some aggressive moves to bring in top guys, or did the wrestlers feel it hurt them because there was one less big money contract slot available?

Austin: Well, when they brought Savage aboard, they already had Gene Okerlund Bobby Heenan, a couple of other guys. I really didn't think that was a step in the right direction. I mean, Hogan already had his run in New York but he was still such a big name and you couldn't go wrong unless you get carried away. But with Savage, I didn't really see that being the right move. He had his day, and a hell of a day at that, but I don't know if the guys were happy about it.

He cost everybody a big paycheck. They had to cut a few guys to pay him because they had already taken care of Hogan. As far as whether he was gonna go heel or babyface, you knew he was gonna be one of the top guys so it put you a notch further down the food chain. It didn't boost my morale any. I wasn't a babyface, but I knew I wasn't going to be out there pounding Randy Savage. I was gonna be looking up at the lights, so that didn't help my morale whatsoever.

Keller: You were pretty much on the outside looking in due to injuries while this was going on. Did you think that when you went back you would be part of a promotion that had a lot of momentum and if you were used right, you'd be on the same level as "the big boys"? Or did you just look in and think politically you would not be a big part of things?

Austin: Yeah, the latter. That was what I was feeling. Politically I didn't believe I was in a good position. When I was asked to put Savage over in five minutes, and they asked me to put The Renegade over at the Disney TV tapings and I refused to do that, I pretty well saw the writing on the wall. I wasn't going to put my head down and have a sh-- attitude. I just did the best I could. But I didn't feel I was going to be a big part of WCW.

Keller: You had two major injuries that put you out of action over the past two years.

Austin: Back to back. I hurt my knee wrestling Jim Duggan in Sarasota. I tripped over his arm. I don't know how I did that. And then rather than get my knee fixed, I took the time off and rehabbed it. Then I came back from that injury and went down to the Disney tapings. They didn't have anything for me. They didn't

know what to do with me. This was when there was the booking committee, when Flair was in charge, so they didn't know what to do with Steve Austin. If they didn't know what to do with me, they probably should have had a new booking committee.

Then they sent me to Japan after hardly doing anything because they didn't know what to do with me. All of a sudden I go to Japan for three weeks after having hardly been in the ring. Even though I had been in the gym every day, the body's not in ring shape and used to taking the bumps and having the resilience built up. I attempted to splash a guy over there in Japan. He moved and my arm bent too far up under me and I tore my tricep off my elbow. I wrestled two and a half weeks hurt. I came home and got it reattached. Now it's 100 percent. I always prided myself on being a pretty durable guy but just two bad accidents and a string of bad luck for me there stopped me, but I really had nothing going my way to begin with. I think that led to my demise in WCW.

Keller: Since you haven't wrestled nearly as often in the last two years as you had in the years before that, do you feel you've lost several steps that you'll be able to regain really quickly? Or are you right where you left off? Or will it take quite a while to get back to the level you had reached?

Austin: The only thing I think I need right now is my cardiovascular endurance. That comes from being in the ring. I bust my ass running every day, but as much as you can run, you can be in damn good shape, but not in ring shape. Once you get in the ring and it's demanding that kind of physical endurance, it's completely different. About three weeks on the road is all it will take to get back there. But mentally, probably the same amount of time in terms of getting the gears in your head to click like they used to. In other ways, I'm ahead of myself. There are certain things from watching matches and such where I think I'm ahead of where I was. Other things like the timing, well, you have to be in the ring. So that's what I need right now, but it won't take long to achieve that and go past it again.

Keller: When you had time off, what did you do to occupy yourself?

Austin: Anytime I was hurt, I worked out what (muscles) I could work out. And then when it was hunting season, I hunted just about every single day.

Keller: What kind of hunting?

Austin: Deer hunting, turkey hunting, dove hunting, and then some fishing, although mainly just catching catfish and stuff like that.

Keller: In terms of the business itself, did you follow it really closely or did you try to distance yourself while you were away?

Austin: I watched because I wanted to see what everyone else was doing. I was interested because that is still the way I make my living. I watched just to see what everybody else was doing and to see what the other organizations were doing, too.

Keller: Do you think WCW looked at your time out and thought you were milking your injuries? Did they give you that impression?

Austin: They could look at the time I was off and maybe then base their decision to fire me on the time I was off. That's the way it was put to me. But as far as milking it, that would be a bunch of b.s. because the doctors were right there telling what was wrong with me. Of course there's the damn scar on the back of my arm and the MRI's that show I tore my tricep off my elbow. I never milked anything, but if they fired me because of the time I had been off, any kind of athletes be it a pro wrestler, a professional football player, a baseball player, no one asks to be injured. Certain things happen and those are the hazards of this type of job.

Keller: Does it seem kind of strange that in wrestling when you get hurt on the job rather than the promotion apologizing and saying, "Boy, thanks for sacrificing yourself for us," the attitude basically was, "You're injured, you're fired"?

Austin: Yeah, it's kind of a weird situation. Sometimes you definitely get the feeling you're unappreciated. But you're looking at a bunch of guys who were trying to cut back a budget that was screwed up by a couple of people before them. So maybe there was a need to try to cut back on a few things. Like I said when you're out there in the ring, you're not trying to get hurt. Of course, you always have that potential. But like I said with any kind of physical activity there's a risk. I don't think that just because you get injured, you should get fired, no matter how long you're off.

Keller: In a convoluted way, do you think you are better off not having been healthy the past two years because it kept you from being burned out on TV or even buried by Hogan?

Austin: It could work either way. I just know that I didn't get fired but four or five months ago and I was paid my full paychecks up until that point, so it isn't like I lost a whole lot of money. Certainly a little bit, but the mindset there at WCW from both the bookers in the South Tower and the corporate side of it at the North Tower, maybe they didn't see any kind of big money potential with someone like me, so they chose to fire me. That's fine. I guess (being fired) is the best thing that happened to me. My time there was almost up. I would have only had a few more months on my contract. I lost a little bit of money, but it was definitely time to freshen up and change a little bit.

Keller: Was your contract somewhere in

the 200 grand per year range?

Austin: Yeah, somewhere around there.

Keller: What kind of steps did you take before reaching that pay scale?

Austin: I don't want to talk a whole lot, but it was a well known fact that when you first went to WCW you got paid \$75,000 standard the first year and then from there I took progressive steps up with each contract or each year.

Keller: Didn't Eric Bischoff or someone in the office once tell you that you weren't getting a push because you weren't marketable because they didn't think dolls of you would sell?

Austin: Look at the string of bookers that went through there. I got along with everybody. Yet, I mean, Dusty Rhodes was never going to do anything with me. Flair was never going to push me because I had a potential to be a good heel. He was the top heel so he wouldn't work hard on my behalf if he thought I was potentially a threat. Then Kevin Sullivan had the book. He and I don't really get along all that well. He wasn't going to push me and had nothing for me to do.

But back to your question, Bischoff did tell me one time he didn't know how to market me. That was a few months before I was fired. He told me, "You know, we've gotta do something with you. You come out there in your black boots and your black trunks and we don't know what to do with you. We can't sell any dolls of that." He said he's got two or three guys who can go out there in the same kind of stuff I go out in. He goes, "If we can't think of anything for you to do, you need to start talking to ECW or New Japan." I said, "If you've got some ideas..." They were talking about trying to dress me up. Someone in the booking committee was saying, "No, Austin doesn't want to do that." I wondered how they knew what I was willing and not willing to do unless they asked me? For someone to sit there and make decisions for me is a bunch of bullshit. When they were sitting there talking about trying to change my image, I don't think they ever really gave it a serious consideration because they thought I was so head strong and stubborn that I wasn't going to do anything they said. But then again, I probably wouldn't have because I hadn't seen a whole lot of good ideas come out of their booking committees.

Keller: You talked about this somewhat on ECW television, but what were the details behind your departure from WCW?

Austin: I was off rehabilitating and got a message on my machine for me to call Eric (Bischoff). Well, I call Eric and he asked me how the arm was doing. I told him I was rehabbing and I was almost ready to come back. He said, "Well, I don't want to sugar coat anything. I'm just gonna tell you that we're

All they had to do was tell me, "Hey, Steve, why don't you come in. We need to talk about something." Sh--, I would have known I was about to get fired. But at least he would have had the damn respect to tell me to my face rather than over the telephone. He called me on the phone like I was just some piece of crap. I didn't particularly like that.

going to exercise our right to terminate our agreement. When your arm is better, maybe we can talk again." I said, "Basically what you're saying is, 'I'm fired.'" He goes, "Well, yeah." I said, "All right. Bye." And that's how I got fired.

Keller: It was really that short of a conversation?

Austin: Yeah. It might have lasted about five more seconds than that, maybe five more words, but basically that was the conversation. I know this is professional wrestling and I've never been a prima donna or been hard to get along with and I've always worked hard. The thing that pissed me off, all they had to do—like I said I understand being fired, and being fired isn't what pissed me off—I only live 30 miles from the CNN Center. All they had to do was tell me, "Hey, Steve, why don't you come in. We need to talk about something." Sh--, I would have known I was about to get fired. But at least he would have had the damn respect to tell me to my face rather than over the telephone. What was I going to do? I would have said okay, shook his hand, and walked out of there. That never happened. He called me on the phone like I was just some piece of crap. I didn't particularly like that. I just don't think that's a very good way to do business and it pissed me off.

Keller: Do you think under some circumstances some people would have rather been told on the phone rather than be asked to drive 30 miles each way to be told in a one minute conversation they were being fired? Or do you believe it is just common courtesy that when someone has been with a company for five years give or take, that the firing should be done in person and you

shake their hand and say good bye in person.

Austin: I don't know what anybody else would have wanted, but I mean that's what I would have expected. That's the way I was brought up. I don't mind if I was working on a damn freight dock, they should tell me in person. That's just the way I am. When I came in there I shook everybody's hand and looked them in the eye. When I leave I'd just as soon have had the same thing happen. I understand this is the business of wrestling and the machine moves on without anybody. When Hogan and Flair were gone, everything kept going without them, so of course it's going to keep going without Steve Austin. But the fact of the matter was I just didn't like when someone calls me up with some smug, smart-ass attitude and fires me on the phone. If he's gonna be smug and smart-ass, be that way to my face so I can shake your hand, look you in the eye, and then walk out. That's all I wanted.

Keller: Was Bischoff smug and smart-ass about it?

Bischoff: It sounded like that to me. Again, maybe that's just the way I took it.

Keller: Do you think aside from how they fired you, was it fair of them to fire you?

Austin: Yes, it was fair of him to fire me. Like I said, if he's trying to cut back and I wasn't able to work, fine. I did offer to do interviews, manage, do anything. I talked to (Kevin) Sullivan up there two times about wanting to do something or whatever. I offered to try to be helpful and try to justify drawing a paycheck because I knew I wasn't working and I was making good money. I tried to do something. It wouldn't have been much, but it would have been something. I understand they felt it was better to spend money on guys who could work instead of on me to sit on my ass and do nothing. I didn't mind they fired me. I didn't like the way they did it.

Keller: How many times in your years in WCW were you tested for drugs?

Austin: I guess about four or five.

Keller: Were they done early, in the middle, or at the end of your tenure?

Austin: Just spread out here and there.

Keller: You were tested about once a year?

Austin: Basically, yeah.

Keller: Were there stretches during your stay in WCW where it was pretty well known that a lot of the guys were using steroids? And were there stretches where guys for one reason or another weren't on steroids?

Austin: I don't know. Like I said, I didn't pay attention to the testing policy. Some of the guys would get on a cycle or something, but the basic big flag guys who were neon signs for it were pretty much tested for it and shut down.

Someone here or there could get away with it. I think the testing policy was good enough and fair enough.

Keller: So the guys who were suspected of being on steroids were tested more often than you?

Austin: It would seem a guy would go in there and get tested one, two, or three times there really quick. Supposedly they are random, but every once in a while someone would get two or three tests thrown at them.

Keller: In general was there obvious recreational drug use there?

Austin: Probably more when I first got there than when I left. When I left they seemed a little more serious about the testing. No guys I could really say were having a big problem with anything.

Keller: In your last couple of years ydld ou knew of guys who would get groups together to smoke pot or do whatever?

Austin: Yeah, there'd be a couple of guys here and there.

Keller: During the steroid trials and all of the public scrutiny the WWF was facing, did that affect the locker room atmosphere in WCW and did guys seem to become more careful or was the problem seen as a distant thing happening way up in New York and not actually affecting them?

Austin: They didn't think it directly affected them, but indirectly because the wrestlers were doing the same thing you were doing on TV (to earn their living). Nobody though said, hey those guys are getting tested so let's not do this or that. Everything kind of hit the fan up there for a while, but nobody was really making a big deal about it. Basically everybody was hoping everything would come out okay for those guys.

Keller: Did you ever feel pressure that you needed to be on steroids to compete or to help your push or to justify your pay?

Austin: Yeah, sometimes. When you see some of those red flag guys who are getting a little more TV time than you are, sometimes you think that. But it's those same guys that are getting the big push whether everybody's clean or everybody's off. Don't get me wrong. A little gas, too, is gonna help somebody all the more, but if the playing field were all even and everybody were clean, the same guys would get the push.

Keller: Your character in WCW wasn't one who got over merely because of your physique. You're physique was an asset to your character, but when one thought of Steve Austin they didn't think "bodybuilder." Do you think had you been your whole time a heavy steroid user who focused entirely on bodybuilding you would have been pushed more?

Austin: (pause) Yeah, for somebody like me probably. Maybe if the drugs aren't an issue from the corporate tower and they looked and saw a better physique, yes, maybe that would have helped. But from the people who were running the show, the bookers, no probably not at all. But the Tower of Marks might have liked it better if I were bigger.

Keller: So the North Tower (where Bischoff's bosses reside) might send word to the South Tower saying, "Hey, we like this Austin guy. Why isn't he getting more TV time?"

Austin: Yeah, probably so. I can't say that for sure, but it seems to be the way they are. Not that they're into muscleheads, but they are more into an out of ordinary look. Look at Sting's whole gimmick. He always looks good, he's tanned, he has good outfits and jackets, it's what would appeal more to the corporate side of it more so than the wrestling side of it.

Keller: Shifting gears now. When you left WCW, what did you think at the time were your options?

Austin: Japan, ECW, and the WWF—the obvious ones.

Keller: Why did you go to ECW? Was it because it was something you could do quickly and easily without a longterm commitment and have some fun?

Austin: Paul E. was one of the first guys to call me, like a day after I was fired, and offer me a job. I told him if I wanted to go somewhere else, that's what I would do. That was the understanding we had from day one. I wasn't as heavily into that mix as I could have been because I was still rehabbing by the time I started there. I was still getting everything back together in the ring. Yeah, we reached an agreement but we both knew it wasn't necessarily a long term agreement.

Keller: When you arrived in ECW and you saw how they operated and the scope of their business, did you think this was more small time than you thought or was it something special?

Austin: I didn't think it was small time at all. Sure, they were operating on a smaller budget than WCW or the WWF, but all the guys there are tremendous. It's one of the best locker rooms I've been in. Everybody is up there busting their ass. They're all working hard. It's one of the hardest working crews I've seen.

Keller: If that attitude in the locker room switched to WCW would WCW have been more successful?

Austin: If they adopted an ECW attitude?

Keller: Not in terms of what they do in the ring stylistically, but in terms of the work ethic and the way they get along in the locker room?

Austin: Nah, I doubt it. I don't put a whole lot of stock in locker room attitude where they say the locker room is down or this or that. The bottom line is when a guy goes out there in the ring, it doesn't matter if the locker room is worth a damn or not, it matters what mindset he's in as far as being involved in the product, not the locker room on a whole.

Keller: Is there something inherent in the way WCW operates that almost makes them the Tampa Bay Buccaneers of football or the L.A. Clippers of basketball in that there is something there that prevents them from doing what they need to do to get on stride?

Austin: Yeah, there is something there. I couldn't put a finger on it. The people up there who have the book—like I said, I don't think anybody who is in the ring should be booking the thing. They need to have somebody up there saying this is how it is and this is how it's going to be. But when that's one of the top heels or babyfaces, it's going to be too one-sided. As far as the corporate part of it, when you've got a bunch of executives who don't like wrestling to begin with but are stuck with the wrestling program, they look at the numbers on a sheet and say, "Well, Wrestler A and Wrestler B had a hell of a rating last Saturday, so let's put them on next Saturday and try to get a good rating out of it." Well, they already wrestled. Maybe there was an issue that drew a rating that won't translate a week later. But they're not even taking that into consideration. They're just looking at the formula of the two guys who were involved rather than the circumstances involved. They influence what the booker does when it doesn't make sense what they say based on limited knowledge. You've got a group of guys who don't know a damn thing about wrestling and a group of a guys who are supposed to know a lot about wrestling but sure act like they don't and it just doesn't seem to work.

Keller: What was your first impression upon walking into ECW Arena?

Austin: It was a great atmosphere. As far as pure wrestling atmosphere, I think the Dallas Sportatorium sold out is tough to beat. As far as a wild crowd that will definitely get you into everything and is a big part of the show, then ECW is like nothing else.

Keller: Did you sense behind the scenes there was any contempt or a condescending attitude toward the crowd where they thought the fans were just marks for them? Or to the other extreme, was there a tremendous respect from the locker room for the fans, almost a camaraderie?

Austin: I wouldn't say really either. I wouldn't say camaraderie. I'd say the guys that are backstage know that the people are going to get into it. They're not looking down at the people thinking they're marks in any way, shape, or form. They know the fans are part of

the show, but it's not camaraderie. They just know the people want to see someone working their ass off and see effort and that's what the guys go out and give them. I think it works out well for the fans and the wrestlers.

Keller: How was it working for Paul E. as a booker compared to Dusty Rhodes and Ric Flair?

Austin: I think he's better because he's more creative. He tries to get all the talent involved. He's not trying to draw a house on one guy. He's trying to draw through everybody on the crew. Everybody has something to do up there. Paul E., I know he's got his hands full with so much going on and trying to do everything as far as making the TVs, running the shows, calling finishes, it's a one-man show as far as the operations of it. He has his hands full. He does an excellent job in being creative and aggressive and trying to get everyone involved and making it an exciting, fast-moving show.

Keller: Was there anything about the way Paul E. approached you that didn't quite work for you?

Austin: No, not at all. He's great to work with. We'd have a little disagreement here or there. Maybe because I wasn't going to be there long term, I didn't get as involved in things. With the chances of me not being there long, I was pretty limited in what did.

Keller: Was it kind of liberating to have a microphone and a forum to go off and say what you wanted rather than be limited by a 30 second soundbite interview? Was it fun to do the imitations of Hulk Hogan and Eric Bischoff?

Austin: Yeah, a lot of fun. When you first start off doing interviews you don't know what your character is and what you're supposed to talk about. Nine times out of ten you don't have any material to talk about anyway. So when I went to ECW I told Paul E. I had some ideas. The first lengthy interview I cut was six or seven minutes. It was 4:30 in the morning by that time and didn't even want to do that interview because I didn't have anything to talk about. He just told me to go out there and talk. So I sat down and I did. It was a lot fun. It was a big release. Everything I've done from the Hulk Hogan thing to the Bischoff thing, I had a lot of material. They were basically shoot interviews. If they give you the time and you have the material, it's hard to go wrong. Don't get me wrong. I don't think I made any friends over at WCW with it. But in terms of entertaining ECW fans, that's what I mean.

Keller: When you were at ECW you were looking at the possibility of supplementing that income with a job in Japan. What kind of steps does a wrestler in your position take who wants to get to All Japan or New Japan?

Austin: I didn't go out and aggressively call anybody because I was still rehabbing my arm.

So then right before I got back in the ring, I got a few phone calls from All Japan and I had an offer to go there. I was just laying around the house rehabbing my arm and doing some stuff for ECW when they gave me a call. I didn't go out there and beat the door down on the promotion. I just waited and they called me.

Keller: Obviously when you left WCW you thought one of your options was working for the WWF. What was your attitude about going there? Was that your primary option or did you think it would be better to go to ECW as a grass roots upstart promotion and couple that with the security of an income from All Japan?

Austin: I wasn't leaning toward anything at first. I just went to ECW because they were the first ones to call. It wasn't a long term commitment. If I got an offer from the WWF I thought I might definitely want to go there and give it a shot because it is a national promotion and a place to make a living.

Keller: How did your negotiations with them begin?

Austin: They found out I was fired and Vince and I got together on the phone and just started talking. It just kinda went from there.

Keller: You had a meeting with Bill Watts before meeting with Vince—how did that go?

Austin: We kinda talked about when we were together down in WCW. There was one time when me and Watts had a little blow up (in WCW). But Bill is extremely knowledgeable about the wrestling business and I thought it was a good thing that he was up there. I looked forward to working up there with him being there.

Keller: Why did you eventually choose to sign with the WWF instead of All Japan or somewhere else?

Austin: As far as staying here in the States, my only full time option was the WWF. But I thought real seriously about going to All Japan because when I am back in shape and all the gears are clicking, the All Japan and New Japan style is basically my style. I really think I could have done well there. But I wanted to give the WWF a try because I like the soap opera element of American wrestling. I like the national exposure that the organizations here in the States give you. I like the angles and everything that goes with it, not just going out there and having an athletic match which is a big deal for me when I work in Japan, but when the whole package comes together in the United States I felt like creatively it could be a hell of a lot of fun.

Keller: Right now do you feel a kind of adrenaline rush because you think you're finally going to be used correctly and be in a top spot?

Austin: Yeah, I talked to J.J. (Dillon) today about getting some dates to plan around and I told him I was dying to get back in the ring—and I am, because I haven't really been in the ring for so long and I'm just anxious to soak it all up in my brain and get everything going and be everything I can be in the ring and try to get better than I was before and have the opportunity to get back on a roll again in the ring and behind the microphone and come up with something that is going to draw money and draw ratings. I want to find out exactly what I can do and what I can't do and the WWF is the best place to do that because I believe they're going to try to use me to the best of my potential.

Keller: Did the experiences of Shane Douglas and Al Snow, given their initial high expectations, make you a bit tentative about the decision to sign with the WWF? Or do you think you're Steve Austin and they're different people?

Austin: No, I don't think that at all. I think they're both extremely talented. If I want to buy a new Corvette and they both have one and they both don't like them, should I base my decision to not buy a Corvette on their bad experiences? Well, maybe they had some bad luck up there, but I'm going up there for myself with a positive attitude and I'm not looking at what happened to them as affecting me in any way, shape, or form, not because I'm Steve Austin, but because I'm going to go up there and bust my ass and do the best job I can. I feel that if I do that they can use me and I can help them.

Keller: Is there an eagerness to work on the road full time? It will be the first time in a long time you will be doing that, both because of injuries and WCW's light schedule. Is there an excitement to be a "real wrestler" in a sense, on the road going to airports and hotels again for days in a row? Or is that a negative aspect of working for the WWF?

Austin: No, it excites me because I know I'll be in the ring that many times a month and to me that's the only way you can get into good ring shape and that's the only way you can get confident in your work again. That's the only way my mind can start working the way it used to. I'm definitely looking forward to being on the road. Don't get me wrong, the road can be a grind but I mean I haven't done much in a long time other than lay on my ass watching these guys on TV. That's not from being a mark, that's from being a professional wrestler for a living. (Watching matches) goes with the territory. I want to get back in the ring, on the road, and on TV and everything that goes with it. I'm excited about it.

Keller: What kind of a drive do you have to be a truly great wrestler? I mean, do you just want to go out there and be a good wrestler, fill a role, earn your money, and draw some fans, or do you have a drive now—especially

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after being out of action for a couple of years—to be a legitimately great wrestler? Do you want to be written up in the history books that Steve Austin was one of the greats of his era?

Austin: It's a drive that's in my mind, but every time I get in the ring I don't go out there thinking I've got to be the greatest there ever was. But that said, if I dug ditches for a living, I would be one of the best ditch diggers in the world because that's the way I've gone about every job I've ever done. I do everything to the best of my ability. That's the way my parents brought me up. Every time I used to do a job half way, my dad would whip my ass and be on me. He'd say, "Son, if you're going to do a job, you might as well do it right." That's just the way I was brought up. Anything I do I do 110 percent or I don't do it at all. Yeah, I'd like to be remembered as great some day. But it's not in my mind because I want to be great. It's in my mind because that's just the way I was raised, to bust your ass at everything you do. And with wrestling, that's exactly what I'm going to do when I get back in the ring.

Keller: Are there things you realize you're going to have to do in the WWF to become great, other than get back into ring shape? Are there elements as a wrestler that you can pinpoint that you need to work on?

Austin: Yeah. I don't want to bring them out specifically because I don't want everyone looking for them or knowing what I am exactly trying to do, but there are a lot of things I know I need to improve on. One would just be wrestling knowledge in general. Not that I want to be a scientific wrestler, but just the more you know about legitimate wrestling, the more it can be applied without having a boring match. I'd just like to have a broader knowledge of mat wrestling. I don't want to put people to sleep, so it's got to be the right mix and the right combination.

I'm so excited about getting in the ring right

now, but the only way to improve where I want to is to get back on the road for 15 or 20 days at a time and having the repetition and listen to the crowd and see what they're buying and what they're not buying. Plus, like I always do, I'll watch all the other matches on the show, too.

Keller: At this point in your career are you good enough where you don't need to add highspots or new moves or are you conscious of not wanting to be stagnated in terms of your style as the years go by?

Austin: I definitely like to add new moves all the time, but I haven't been in the ring for so long I've gotta practice what I already know. But I do want to add moves. Like Ric Flair has had the same offense for a long time and you've got these guys who weigh a hell of a lot less than he or I who do a bunch of crazy high impact, crazy type moves which are amazing. So adding one or two moves to your arsenal when these guys are doing things you can't even come close to touching, is it really going to mean that much? I think it's good for a little variety, but I don't think it's the bottom line. To me, the thing that's always going to work is the psychology. Nothing means anything if there's not a reason for it. Shawn Michaels does some incredible stuff that I can't touch if I'm 240 pounds. I'll come up with my own style and a few things different in the WWF. I just have to see if it works. No matter how much time I spend in the business from here on in, be it a month or another ten years, I'm happy with the things I have done. I'm not the most flamboyant individual in the sport, so I'm just happy to have gotten what I've gotten out of the sport. Looking down the road I want to get a hell of a lot more out of it and put a hell of a lot more into it.

Keller: Was the character you'd play in the WWF a major issue of discussion during negotiations?

Austin: No. They had an idea. It sounded okay to me. It sounded good enough that I'd give it a try. It wasn't a big part of the negotiations at all. You're gonna go in there and try something you don't like anyway. If it doesn't work, they're gonna change it anyway. Those guys know enough that they're going to come up with something for you.

Keller: Was the main issue in negotiations how you'd be used, but not specifically your character or title, such as you wanting it to be clear you'd be a singles wrestler at a certain level with a certain type of push?

Austin: Yeah, I covered that in 30 seconds of conversation and we were on the same page. Nothing I ever talked about with them was a major controversy. Everybody signs the same basic agreement. That's what I signed. If I can perform and talk and they can use me, they're going to use me to the best of their ability because they're going to try to make themselves

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money. As a result, I'll make myself some money. I don't figure they're going to hire me and not make the most of me.

Keller: What do you think about the state of the wrestling industry in general today?

Austin: I always go for reality. That's just what I like. I used to watch Houston wrestling and today a lot of people might think that's pretty dull, but if I could watch a particular year of wrestling or a period of years, I would probably take the years with people like Nick Bockwinkel, the Funks, Bob Orton Jr., Harley Race, plus Dusty Rhodes and Ric Flair earlier on. If I could watch that type of wrestling today, I'd watch the other stuff too, but I would look most forward to those kinds of wrestlers. So in my opinion, the bottom line to me is reality. The more you cater to that type of atmosphere, the better off you'll be. It wasn't too many years ago when there was still a good question of: Is wrestling real or fake? Now, it's not even a question. So that's just my personal view.

Keller: Do wrestles today tend to be more or less optimistic than when you broke into the industry?

Austin: Probably more optimistic when I broke in. I mean, now there are really only two promotions you can work for in this country, and not having a training ground or a variety of territories to go to if you get fed up with the way things go in one territory isn't a plus. As far as the prospects of the business picking up in general, it was better back when I started. Now, if you can't make a living in WCW or the WWF, and you're not a candidate to go to Japan, you're pretty well screwed.

Keller: How much longer do you want to wrestle?

Austin: As long as it takes. Five more years at least easy. Hopefully I can do ten years and that's about it. Until I'm about 40. In my opinion it

takes you ten years in this business to have a complete hand. People can be good before that amount of time, but ten years to me is kind of the magic point in someone's career when they are really polished and have ring psychology—when they know who they are and what they are and they have everything down pretty well.

Keller: Would you like to eventually get involved in the management side once you're through wrestling?

Austin: Possibly if something like that were to come up.

Keller: Would you be more apt to be a road agent or a booker or a front office guy?

Austin: Definitely not a booker. I think I have good ideas, but I wouldn't want to book a whole territory. I would want to chip in ideas because that's where I think my strong points are—coming up with tangents and ideas that someone else can take and make a whole program into. It depends on where I happened to be financially. I might have another job I'd want to go into. I never have done those other jobs you're talking about, so I wouldn't know what to expect out of them.

Keller: If you weren't involved in the wrestling business after retiring at age 40 or 42, do you have an idea of what you might want to do?

Austin: Nope, I don't have a clue.

Keller: If you had never become a pro wrestler, do you have any idea what you'd be doing right now?

Austin: Yeah, I'd probably be making six figures managing a regional freight terminal or something like that. I almost got a degree in P.E. I wouldn't see myself coaching a high school football team because I can't see myself doing something like that. I'd be doing something, but I'd be doing something I'd be making a good living at. That would be for sure.

Keller: How has being a professional wrestler affected your family life?

Austin: My last year or two at WCW was extremely frustrating because they were paying me pretty good money, but that's not the only issue. If you're constantly being crapped on the whole time and not doing what you want to be doing within the company, TV, and wrestling, you're still frustrated no matter that they're paying you money. I'm just glad to have the last few months or year behind me now. The only thing that frustrates me is that wrestling goes on without me and I don't want to be left out. I want to be out there with the rest of the guys busting my ass doing TV. That's why I got into wrestling, because I enjoy it. I'm ready to get all the frustration behind me.

1995 TORCH YEARBOOK APPENDIX

U.S. MAJOR LIVE TELEVISION EVENTS

WWF ROYAL RUMBLE—Jan. 22 Tampa, Fla.—Sundome

Jeff Jarrett (w/Roadie) pinned Razor Ramon to capture the Intercontinental Title at 20:57 (**1/2), Undertaker defeated I.R.S. (mgd. by Ted DiBiase) at 11:52 (*), Diesel fought Bret Hart to a 30 minute draw so Diesel retained the WWF Title (***1/4), 1-2-3 Kid & Bob Holly defeated Bam Bam Bigelow & Tatanka when Kid pinned Bigelow at 15:40 (***3/4) after which Bigelow shoved Lawrence Taylor to set up Wrestlemania, and Shawn Michaels eliminated British Bulldog to win a 30 man Royal Rumble (**).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 1.00 (\$2.59 million); live attendance 10,000 (\$145,000); *Torch* poll results 7.2 Hart vs. Diesel (best match), I.R.S. vs. Undertaker (worst).

WCW CLASH ON TBS—Jan. 25 Las Vegas, Nev.—Caesar's Palace

Arn Anderson pinned Johnny B. Badd at 6:38 to retain the WCW Title (**1/4), Alex Wright pinned Bobby Eaton at 7:18 (**1/4), Harlem Heat beat Stars & Stripes (Marcus Bagwell & The Patriot Del Wilkes) to retain the WCW Tag Team Titles when Stevie Ray pinned Bagwell at 8:50 (**1/4), Sting defeated Avalanche (John Tenta) via submission at 5:22 (*1/2), Hulk Hogan & Randy Savage (mgd. by Jimmy Hart) defeated Kevin Sullivan & The Butcher (Ed Leslie) when Hogan pinned Butcher at 12:07.

Statistics: Rating 3.5 (5.6 share, 2,160,00 viewers); live attendance 3,500 (2,300 paid, \$60,000); *Torch* poll results 3.4, Badd vs. Anderson (best), Hogan & Savage vs. Butcher & Sullivan (worst).

WCW SUPERBRAWL—Feb. 19 Baltimore, Md.—Baltimore Arena

Alex Wright pinned Paul Roma at 13:15 (*3/4), Hacksaw Duggan pinned Bunkhouse Buck at 11:51 (1/2*), Kevin Sullivan pinned Dave Sullivan at 7:16 (DUD), Harlem Heat (mgd. by Sister Sherri) beat The Nasty Boys via top rope DQ at 17:05 (**3/4), Blacktop Bully pinned Dustin Rhodes at 15:55 (*1/4), Sting & Randy Savage beat Avalanche & Big Bubba Rogers when Sting pinned Avalanche at 10:11 (*1/4), Hulk Hogan beat Vader via DQ at 15:08 (**3/4).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.95 (\$2.45 million, live attendance 13,339 (10,000, \$165,000), *Torch* poll 3.3, Savage & Sting vs. Avalanche & Bubba (best), Duggan vs. Buck (worst).

WCW UNCENSORED—Mar. 19 Tupelo, Miss.—Tupelo Coliseum

Blacktop Bully beat Dustin Rhodes in a pre-taped match fought on the back of a moving truck (*), Meng (mgd. by Sonny Ono) beat Hacksaw Duggan in a martial arts match at 7:16, Johnny B. Badd beat Arn Anderson in a boxer vs. wrestler match (1/4*), Randy Savage beat Avalanche via DQ at 13:00, Big Bubba Rogers pinned Sting at 13:20 (**1/4), The Nasty Boys beat Harlem Heat in a no-rules Texas Tornado match (**3/4), Hulk Hogan defeated Vader when he actually pinned Ric Flair at 18:25 (**).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.96 (\$2.8 million), live attendance 5,782 (4,900, \$83,650), *Torch* poll results 2.8, Nasty Boys vs. Harlem Heat (best), Meng vs.

Hacksaw Duggan (worst).

WWF WRESTLEMANIA—Apr. 2 Hartford, Conn.—Clivic Center

British Bulldog & Lex Luger beat Jacob & Eli Blu at 6:27 (*3/4), Razor Ramon (w/Roadie) beat Jeff Jarrett (w/1-2-3 Kid) via DQ when Roadie interfered at 12:33 (***), Undertaker (mgd. by Paul Bearer) defeated King Kong Bundy (mgd. by Ted DiBiase) at 6:09 (1/2*), Owen Hart & Yokozuna (mgd. by Jim Cornette and Mr. Fuji) beat The Smoking Gunns when Owen pinned Bart Gunn to capture the WWF Tag Titles (**), Bret Hart beat Mr. Bob Backlund in an I-quit match at 9:35 (*1/2), Diesel pinned Shawn Michaels at 20:24 to retain the WWF Title (***3/4), Lawrence Taylor pinned Bam Bam Bigelow at 11:39 (**1/4).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 1.4 (\$5.1 million), live attendance 15,000 sellout (\$750,000), *Torch* poll 6.3, Michaels vs. Diesel (best), Jacob & Eli Blu vs. Bulldog & Luger (worst).

ULTIMATE FIGHT 5—Apr. 7 Charlotte, N.C.—Independence Arena

(Round One) John Hess beat Andy Anderson at 1:23, Todd Medina beat Larry Cureton at 2:55, Oleg Taktarov beat Ernest Verdecia at 2:24, Dan Severn beat Joe Charles at 1:39, (Round Two) Beneteau beat Medina at 2:11, Severn beat Taktarov at 4:21, (Superfight) Royce Gracie fought Ken Shamrock to a 36:00 draw, (Finals) Severn beat Beneteau at 3:03.

Statistics: Est. buyrate 1.05 (\$2.15 million), live attendance 6,000 (4,000, \$150,000).

WWF IN YOUR HOUSE 1—May 14 Syracuse, N.Y.—Colliseum

Bret Hart pinned Hakushi at 14:43 (***3/4), Razor Ramon beat Jeff Jarrett & Roadie at 12:26 (***1/4), Mabel pinned Adam Bomb at 1:52 (*3/4), Owen Hart & Yokozuna beat The Smoking Gunns at 5:44 to retain the WWF Tag Titles, Jerry Lawler pinned Bret Hart at 4:56 (*1/2), Diesel beat Sid via DQ to retain the WWF Title at 12:10 (**).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.83 (\$1.26 million), Live attendance 7,000 (3,500, \$51,748), *Torch* poll 6.1, Bret Hart vs. Hakushi (best), Mabel vs. Bomb (worst).

WCW SLAMBOREE—May 21 St. Petersburg, Fla.—Bayfront Center

Nasty Boys beat Harlem Heat (mgd. by Sister Sherri) to capture the WCW Tag Titles when Nobbs pinned T at 10:45 (**1/4), Kevin Sullivan beat Man with No Name (Ed Leslie) at 5:12 (3/4*), Wahoo McDaniel pinned Dick Murdoch at 6:27 (NR), Great Muta pinned Paul Orndorff to retain the IWGP Hvt. Title at 14:06 (3/4*), Arn Anderson pinned Alex Wright at 11:35 to retain the WCW TV Title (*1/2), Hawk fought Meng to a DCO at 4:43 (*), Sting beat Big Bubba via submission at 9:26, and Hulk Hogan & Randy Savage (w/Renegade) beat Ric Flair & Vader (w/Anderson) when Hogan pinned Flair at 18:52. (**3/4)

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.57 (\$1.46 million), live attendance 7,000 (3,500, \$51,748), *Torch* poll 5.2, Hogan & Savage vs. Flair & Vader (best), Sullivan vs. Butcher (worst).

WCW GREAT AMERICAN BASH—June 18 Dayton, Ohio—O'Hara Arena

Alex Wright pinned Brian Pillman at 15:23

(***1/4), Hacksaw Duggan beat Craig Pittman via DQ at 8:09 (*), Harlem Heat (mgd. by Sister Sherri) beat Bunkhouse Buck & Dick Slater (mgd. by Col. Robert Parker) when Booker T pinned Buck at 8:15 (*1/4), Renegade pinned Arn Anderson at 9:05 to capture the TV Title (*), The Nasty Boys beat The Blue Bloods at 15:00 to retain the WCW Tag Titles (**1/2), Sting pinned Meng at 13:21 to capture the U.S. Hvt. Title in the tournament finals (*3/4), Ric Flair pinned Randy Savage (w/Angelo Poffo) at 14:42 (****1/4).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.7 (\$1.08 million), live attendance 6,482 (\$74,930), *Torch* poll results 5.9, Flair vs. Savage (best), Duggan vs. Pittman (worst).

WWF KING OF THE RING—June 25 Philadelphia, Pa.—The Spectrum

Savio Vega (w/Razor Ramon) defeated Yokozuna (mgd. by Jim Cornette) via countout at 8:25 (*), Roadie (w/Jeff Jarrett) pinned Bob Holly at 7:23 (**1/2), Shawn Michaels fought Kama to a 15 minute draw (**), Mabel pinned Undertaker at 10:26 (*1/2), Savio Vega (w/Ramon) defeated Roadie (w/Jarrett) (*), Bret Hart pinned Jerry Lawler in a "Kiss My Foot" match at 9:18 (**1/4), Mabel pinned Savio Vega at 8:35 to win King of the Ring (3/4*), Diesel & Bam Bam Bigelow defeated Sid & Tatanka (w/Ted DiBiase) when Diesel pinned Tatanka at 15:51 (*3/4).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.65 (\$1.68 million), live attendance 16,590 (14,181, \$311, 680), *Torch* poll 4.8, Bret vs. Lawler (best), Undertaker vs. Mabel (worst).

ULTIMATE FIGHT 6—July 14 Casper, Wyo.—Events Center

(First round) David "Tank" Abbott beat John Matua at 0:18, Paul Varelans beat Cal Worsham at 1:04, Pat Smith beat Rudyard Moncayo at 0:55, Oleg Taktarov beat Dave Beneteau at 0:57, (Second round) Abbot beat Varelans at 1:51, Taktarov beat Anthony Macias at 0:12, (Superfight) Ken Shamrock beat Dan Severn at 2:15, and Taktarov beat Abbott at 17:47.

Statistics: Est. buyrate 1.1 (\$2.33 million), Live attendance 2,700 (\$80,000), *Torch* poll 8.3, Taktarov vs. Abbott (best), Taktarov vs. Macias (worst).

WCW BASH AT THE BEACH—July 16 Huntington Beach, Calif.—Outdoors

Sting beat Meng at 15:28 to retain the U.S. Hvt. Title, Kamala pinned Hacksaw Duggan at 6:08 (DUD), Diamond Dallas Page beat Dave Sullivan at 5:03 (1/4*), Harlem Heat beat The Blue Bloods and The Nasty Boys at 13:30 to retain the Tag Titles (3/4*), Randy Savage pinned Ric Flair at 13:54 (**1/4), Hulk Hogan defeated Vader by escaping the cage at 13:10 (**1/4)

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.82 (\$2.37 million), live attendance 9,000 (free beach show), *Torch* poll 1.8, Flair vs. Savage (best), Renegade vs. Orndorff (worst).

WWF IN YOUR HOUSE—July 23 Nashville, Tenn.—Municipal Auditorium

Roadie pinned 1-2-3 Kid at 7:26 (**1/2), Men on a Mission beat Razor Ramon & Savio Vega when Mabel pinned Ramon at 9:35 (**), Bam Bam Bigelow pinned Henry Godwinn at 5:30 (*), Shawn Michaels pinned Jeff Jarrett to capture the Intercontinental Title at 19:54 (****1/4), Yokozuna & Owen Hart defeated The Allied Powers (Lex Luger & British Bulldog) at 10:53 to retain the WWF Tag Titles (**), Diesel pinned Sid at 10:30 to retain the WWF Title in a lumberjack match (*1/2)

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Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.7 (\$1.08 million), live attendance 6,482 (\$74,930), *Torch* poll 8.0, Shawn Michaels vs. Jeff Jarrett (best), Henry Godwinn vs. Bam Bam Bigelow (worst).

WCW MAIN EVENT/CLASH ON TBS—Aug. 6 Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.—Colliseum

Johnny B. Badd pinned Big Bubba at 3:00 (*), The Nasty Boys beat Los Especialistas (*), Brian Pillman pinned Marcus Bagwell at 4:31 (**1/2), Hulk Hogan beat Kamala by DQ at 4:30 (DUD)... Hawk & Sting beat Meng & Kurasawa at 7:25 (neg. ***), Diamond Dallas Page (w/Diamond Doll) pinned Alex Wright at 8:13 (**), Renegade pinned Paul Orndorff at 3:51 (1/4*), Harlem Heat & Sister Sherri beat Dick Slater & Bunkhouse Buck & Col. Robert Parker at 10:47 (*), Vader beat Ric Flair & Arn Anderson at 8:05 (*).

Statistics: Main Event rating 2.1, Clash rating 3.5 (6.2 share), live attendance 4,059 (\$53,000 paid), *Torch* poll 3.1, Bagwell vs. Pillman (best), Renegade vs. Orndorff (worst).

WWF SUMMERSLAM—Aug. 27 Pittsburgh, Pa.—Civic Arena

Hakushi pinned 1-2-3 Kid at 9:15 (***1/4), Hunter Hearst Helmsley pinned Bob Holly at 6:36 (**1/4), The Smoking Gunns beat Jacob & Eli Blu (mgd. by Uncle Zeb) at 6:05 (**), Barry Horowitz pinned Body Donna Skip (w/Sunny) at 11:20 (***), Bertha Faye (mgd. by Harvey Wippleman) pinned Alundra Blayze at 4:27 (*), Undertaker defeated Kama in a casket match at 16:10 (*3/4), Bret Hart beat Isaac Yankem via DQ when Jerry Lawler interfered at 15:58 (**1/2), Shawn Michaels defeated Razor Ramon in a ladder match to retain the WWF Intercontinental Title at 24:35, Diesel pinned Mabel to retain the WWF Title at 9:20 (**).

Statistics: 0.9 (\$2.37 million), live attendance 18,062 (17,000, \$353,705), *Torch* poll 8.7, Michaels vs. Ramon (best), Blayze vs. Faye worst).

ULTIMATE FIGHTING 7—Sept. 8 Buffalo, N.Y.—War Memorial Auditorium

(First round) Paul Varelans beat Gerry Harris at 1:07, Mark Hall beat Harold Howard at 1:42, Remco Parduel beat Ryan Parker at 3:05, Marco Ruas beat Larry Cureton at 3:25, (Second round) Paul Varelans beat Mark Hall at 1:05, Marco Ruas beat Remco Parduel at 12:27, (Superfight) Ken Shamrock fought Oleg Taktarov to a 33 minute draw, (Finals), Marco Ruas beat Paul Varelans at 13:03.

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.9 (\$1.30 million), live attendance 9,000 (8,200, \$300,000), *Torch* poll 6.9, Marco Ruas vs. Paul Varelans (best), Taktarov vs. Shamrock (worst).

WCW FALL BRAWL—Sept. 17 Asheville, N.C.—Civic Center

Johnny B. Badd pinned Brian Pillman at 29:56 (****1/4), Craig Pittman beat Cobra via submission at 1:25 (1/2*), Diamond Dallas Page pinned Renegade at 8:00 to capture the TV Title (*3/4), Harlem Heat defeated Bunkhouse Buck & Dick Slater to capture the WCW Tag Titles at 17:00 when the Nasty Boys interfered and knocked out Slater (*), Arn Anderson pinned Ric Flair at 22:32 after Brian Pillman interfered, Hulk Hogan & Lex Luger & Sting & Randy Savage defeated Zodiac & Kamala & Meng & Shark in WarGames at 18:42 when Zodiac submitted to Hogan's Boston crab (*).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.48 (\$1.21 million), live

attendance 6,600 (5,100, \$72,000), *Torch* poll 5.2, Johnny B. Badd vs. Brian Pillman (best), Heat vs. Buck & Slater (worst).

WWF IN YOUR HOUSE—Sept. 24 Saginaw, Mich.—Civic Center

Savio Vega pinned Waylon Mercy at 6:59 (1/2*), Sid (mgd. by Ted DiBiase) pinned Henry Godwinn at 7:00 (1/2*), British Bulldog pinned Bam Bam Bigelow at 11:53 (*1/2), Dean Douglas pinned Razor Ramon at 14:55 (**3/4), Bret Hart defeated Jean Pierre LaFitte at 16:39 via submission (****), Shawn Michaels & Diesel defeated British Bulldog & Yokozuna when Diesel pinned the interfering Owen Hart at 16:00 (***1/4).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.4 (\$619,000), live attendance 10,339 (9,000, \$127,976), *Torch* poll 6.1, LaFitte vs. Hart (best), Vega vs. Mercy (worst).

WWF IN YOUR HOUSE—Oct. 22 Winnipeg, Manitoba—Civic Center

Hunter Hearst Helmsley pinned Fatu at 7:58 (*3/4), The Smoking Gunns defeated 1-2-3 Kid & Razor Ramon when Billy Gunn pinned 1-2-3 Kid to retain the WWF Tag Titles at 12:45 (***1/4), Goldust pinned Marty Jannetty at 11:15 (**), Yokozuna fought Mabel to a DCO at 5:20 (1/4*), Razor Ramon defeated Dean Douglas to capture the Intercontinental Title at 11:05 (**1/4), British Bulldog (mgd. by Jim Cornette) defeated Diesel via DQ at 17:50 so Diesel retained the WWF Title (*).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.4 (\$619,000), live attendance 10,339 (9,000, \$127,976 Canadian), *Torch* poll 4.4, Kid & Ramon vs. Smoking Gunns (best), Mabel vs. Yokozuna (worst).

WCW HALLOWEEN HAVOC—Oct. 29 Detroit, Mich.—Joe Louis Arena

Johnny B. Badd pinned Diamond Dallas Page at 17:08 to capture the WCW TV Title (***), Randy Savage pinned Zodiac at 2:00 (1/4*), Kurasawa pinned Hawk at 3:22 (1/2*), Sabu (mgd. by The Sheik) pinned Mr. J.L. at 3:19 (**1/2), Lex Luger defeated Meng (w/Kevin Sullivan) via DQ at 12:47 when Sullivan interfered (1/4*), Sting & Ric Flair fought Brian Pillman & Arn Anderson to a no-contest at 17:00 (**), Lex Luger pinned Randy Savage at 5:34 (*), The Giant (mgd. by Kevin Sullivan) defeated Hulk Hogan (mgd. by Jimmy Hart via DQ at 17:20 when Hart interfered (**).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.6 (\$1.74 million), live attendance 13,000 (7,000, \$138,040), *Torch* poll 4.2, Badd vs. Page (best), Luger vs. Meng (worst).

WWF SURVIVOR SERIES—Nov. 19 Landover, Md.—U.S. Air Arena

The Underdogs (Barry Horowitz & Marty Jannetty & Hakushi & Bob Holly) beat The BodyDonnas (Skip & Rad Radford & Tom Prichard & 1-2-3 Kid) (mgd. by Ted DiBiase) at 18:12 (***), Bertha Faye & Aja Kong & Lioness Aska & Tomoko Watanabe beat Alundra Blayze & Kyoko Inoue & Chaparita Asari & Sakie Hasegawa at 9:55 (*1/4), Goldust pinned Bam Bam Bigelow at 7:37 (*3/4), The Darkside (Undertaker & Savio Vega & Henry Godwinn & Fatu) beat The Royals (Mabel & Jerry Lawler & Isaac Yankem & Hunter Hearst Helmsley) at 13:15 (*3/4), Shawn Michaels & Ahmed Johnson & British Bulldog & Sid defeated Razor Ramon & Yokozuna & Dean Douglas & Owen Hart in the Wildcard match 25:17 (****), Bret Hart pinned Diesel to capture the WWF Title at 24:50 (***).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.57 (\$1.47 million), live attendance 14,500 (12,500, \$250,000), *Torch* poll 7.6, Bret vs. Diesel (best), Goldust vs. Bigelow (worst).

WCW WORLD WAR III—Nov. 26 Norfolk, Va.—The Scope

Johnny B. Badd pinned Diamond Dallas Page (w/Diamond Doll) to capture the WCW TV Title at 12:33 (***1/2), Hacksaw Duggan defeated Big Bubba at 10:10 in a taped fist match (1/4*), Bull Nakano & Akira Hokuto beat Cutie Suzuki & Mayami Ozaki when Bill pinned Osaki at 9:14 (***1/4), Kensuke Sasaki pinned Chris Benoit at 9:59 (***), Lex Luger beat Randy Savage (mgd. by Jimmy Hart) via submission at 5:22 (*), Sting beat Ric Flair with the Scorpion Death Lock at 14:18 (***3/4), Randy Savage eliminated One Man Gang at 29:05 to win the held up WCW Hvt. Title in a 60 man battle royal (*).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.43 (\$1.11 million), live attendance 12,000 sellout (8,038, \$113,000), *Torch* poll: 5.4, Benoit vs. Sasaki (best), Duggan vs. Bubba (worst).

UFC ULTIMATE ULTIMATE—Dec. 16 Denver, Col.—Mammoth Gardens

(First round) Tank Abbott beat Steve Jennum at 1:14, Dan Severn beat Paul Varelans at 1:01, Oleg Taktarov beat Dave Benetau at 1:22, Marco Ruas beat Keith Hackney at 2:39, (Second round) Severn beat Abbott, Taktarov beat Ruas via judge's decision, (Finals) Severn beat Taktarov via judge's decision after a 30 minute draw.

Statistics: Est. buyrate 1.0 (\$2.69 million), live attendance 2,800 (2,200, \$110,000), *Torch* poll 7.5, Severn vs. Taktarov (best), Abbott vs. Jennum (worst).

WWF IN YOUR HOUSE 4—Dec. 17 Hershey, Pa.—Hershey Park Arena

Razor Ramon & Marty Jannetty defeated 1-2-3 Kid & Sid when Ramon pinned Sid (**3/4), Ahmed Johnson pinned Buddy Landel at 0:30 (NR), Hunter Hearst Helmsley beat Henry O. Godwinn in a Hog Pen match at 8:40 (*3/4), Owen Hart beat Diesel via DQ when Diesel shoved the referee at 4:30 (*3/4), Undertaker beat Mabel in a casket match at 6:11 (*1/4), Bret pinned British Bulldog (mgd. by Jim Cornette) at 21:05 to retain the WWF Title (****).

Statistics: 0.33 (\$681,000), live attendance 7,289 (\$100,000), *Torch* poll 6.4, Bret vs. Bulldog (best), Hunter vs. Godwinn (worst).

WCW STARRCADE—Dec. 27 Nashville, Tenn.—Municipal Auditorium

(World Cup matches) Jushin Liger pinned Chris Benoit at 11:12 (***3/4), Koji Kanemoto pinned Alex Wright at 11:50, Lex Luger defeated Masa Chono via torture rack submission at 6:39 (*1/2), Johnny B. Badd (w/Kimberly) beat Masa Saito via top rope DQ at 5:50 (1/4*), Shinjiro Otani defeated Eddie Guerrero at 13:41 (****1/4), Randy Savage pinned Hiroyoshi Tenzan at 6:42 (*), Sting defeated Kensuke Sasaki via submission at 6:45 to give WCW the World Cup, Ric Flair defeated Sting and Lex Luger via countout in a triangle match at 28:00 to decide who would face Randy Savage in the main event (**1/2), Ric Flair pinned Randy Savage at 8:41 to win the WCW Title (**).

Statistics: Est. buyrate 0.36 (\$1.04 million), live attendance 8,200 (6,018, \$83,855), *Torch* poll 7.8, Eddie Guerrero vs. Otani (best), Badd vs. Chono (worst).

Title Changes

WORLD WRESTLING FEDERATION

World Hvt. Champion

11/19/95 (Lansing, Mich.): Bret Hart beat Diesel * at the Survivor Series.

* Been the champion since defeating Bob Backlund on 11/26/94 at New York City's Madison Square Garden.

Women's World Champion

4/3/95 (Poughkeepsie, N.Y. live on Raw): Alundra Blayze defeated Bull Nakano *.

8/27/95 (Pittsburgh, Pa.): Bertha Faye defeated Blaze at SummerSlam.

10/23/95 (Brandon Manitoba, live Raw): Blayze beat Faye. By December the title was deactivated.

* Been the champion since defeating Blayze on 11/20/94 at All Japan Women's event.

Intercontinental Champion

1/22/95 (Tampa, Fla.): * Jeff Jarrett defeated Razor Ramon ** at Royal Rumble.

4/26/95 (Moline, Ill.): Jarrett beat Bob Holly for held-up belt.

5/19/95 (Montreal, Quebec): Razor Ramon beat Jeff Jarrett.

5/21/95 (Montreal, Quebec): Jarrett beat Ramon.

7/23/95 (Nashville, Tenn.): Shawn Michaels beat Jarrett at SummerSlam.

10/22/95: (Winnipeg, Manitoba): Dean Douglas awarded the title at In Your House 4 ***.

10/22/95 (Winnipeg, Manitoba): Razor Ramon def. Douglas at IYH4.

* At the 4/26 TV tapings, the title is held up over disputed referees decisions in defense against Bob Holly.

** Been the champion since SummerSlam '94 (8/29 at Chicago, Ill.) defeating Diesel.

*** Due to legitimate out-of-the-ring injuries, sustained on 10/13 in Syracuse, N.Y., Michaels has to hand over the title to challenger at IYH4.

World Tag Team Champions

1/22/95 (Tampa, Fla.): Bob Holly & 1-2-3 Kid beat Bam Bam Bigelow & Tatanka in * tournament final at the Royal Rumble.

1/23/95 (Palmetto, Fla. live on Raw): The Smoking Gunns (Bart & Billy Gunn) beat Holly & Kid.

4/2/95 (Hartford, Conn.): Owen Hart & Yokozuna beat The Smoking Gunns at Wrestlemania XI.

9/24/95 (Saginaw, Mich.): World Hvt. Champ Diesel & Shawn Michaels beat British Bulldog & Yokozuna at In Your House 3.

9/25/95 (Grand Rapids, Mich. live on Raw): *** Owen & Yokozuna are reinstated as champions.

9/25/95 (Grand Rapids, Mich. live on Raw): The Gunns beat Owen & Yokozuna.

* 11/23/94: Champions Diesel & Shawn Michaels vacate the title by splitting up. They had been the champions since defeating The Head Shrinkers (Fatu & Samu) on 8/28/94 in Indianapolis, Ind.

** "Legal" substitutions for Owen Hart but Owen is pinned as he arrives near the end of the match.

*** As a part of the previously arranged angle the former champions are reinstated as British Bulldog was the legal partner for the IYH3 title defense.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING

WCW Hvt. Champion

11/26/95 (Norfolk, Va.): Randy Savage eliminated (*) battle royal finalist the One Man Gang to become

the champion at World War 3.

12/27/95 (Nashville, Tenn.): Ric Flair defeated Randy Savage at Starrcade.

* Previous champ, Hulk Hogan, held the title since Bash at the Beach '94 (7/17 in Orlando, Fla.) defeating Ric Flair (11/6/95, Jacksonville, Fla.). In a worked angle, the WCW Championship Committee declares the title vacant due to legal improprieties, or questions, resulting from Hogan's title defense against The Giant at Halloween Havoc.

U.S. Hvt. Champion

6/18/95 (Dayton, Ohio): Sting def. Meng in a tournament final * at Bash at the Beach '95.

11/13/95 (Tokyo, Japan): Kensuke Sasaki def. Sting.

12/27/95 (Nashville, Tenn.): One Man Gang defeated Kensuke Sasaki at Starrcade. Gang actually lost the match, but an edited version aired on TV.

* 3/8/95 (Atlanta, Ga.): In a worked angle at TV tapings, Vader is stripped of the title "due to actions at WCW Uncensored" (3/19/95), Vader had held the title since Starrcade '94 (12/27, Nashville, Tenn.) defeating Hacksaw Duggan. During his title reign he was also UWFI World Champion (From 8/18/94 to 4/20/95).

World TV Champion

1/8/95 (Atlanta, Ga., Live Main Event): Arn Anderson defeated Johnny B. Badd *.

6/18/95 (Dayton, Ohio): The Renegade beat Arn Anderson at Bash at the Beach.

9/17/95 (Nashville, Tenn.): "Diamond" Dallas Page defeated Renegade at Fall Brawl.

10/29/95 (Detroit, Mich.): Johnny B. Badd beat Diamond Dallas Page at Halloween Havoc.

* Been champion since Fall Brawl '94 (9/18 in Roanoke, Va.): defeating Steve Regal.

World Tag Team Champions

5/3/95 (Orlando, Fla.): Harlem Heat (Booker T & Stevie Ray) beat The Nasty Boys which is scheduled to air after the Nasty Boys actually win the belts several weeks later at Slamboree.

5/21/95 (St. Petersburg, Fla.): The Nasty Boys (Brian Nobbs & Jerry Sags) beat Harlem Heat * at Slamboree.

6/21/95 (Atlanta, Ga.): The Stud Stable (Bunkhouse Buck & Dick Slater) beat Harlem Heat.

9/17/95 (Nashville, Tenn.): Harlem Heat beat The Stud Stable at Fall Brawl.

9/18/95 (St. Petersburg, Fla. live on Nitro): The American Males (Marcus Bagwell & Scotty Riggz) beat Harlem Heat.

9/27/95 (Atlanta, Ga.) ** Harlem Heat beat The American Males.

* Been the champions since defeating Stars & Stripes (Marcus Bagwell & The Patriot) on 12/8/94 in Atlanta, Ga.

** 10/11/95: (Atlanta, Ga.): Due to too many missed moves in the 9/27 title match the exchange is retaped.

UNITED STATES WRESTLING ASSOC.

Unified Hvt. Title

2/6/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Jerry Lawler * defeated Sid Vicious **.

2/25/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Bill Dundee def. Jerry Lawler.

4/3/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Razor Ramon beat Bill Dundee.

5/1/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Lawler beat Ramon.

11/16/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Ahmed Johnson beat Lawler.

12/16/95 (Memphis, Tenn. live on Raw):

Announced that Jeff Jarrett beat Johnson in Tunica, Miss. to become the new champion.

* 1/28-2/26/95: SMW Hvt. Champion

** Been the champion since defeating Jerry Lawler via forfeit on 7/16/94.

USWA Hvt. Champion

4/3/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Brian Lee * beat Brian Christopher **.

4/17/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Lee beat Christopher for the held up title.

5/13/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Doug Gilbert beat Lee.

5/29/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Christopher beat Gilbert.

6/26/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Billy Jack Haynes beat Christopher.

8/4/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Brad Armstrong beat Haynes.

8/7/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Haynes beat Armstrong.

9/11/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Christopher beat Haynes.

10/7/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Jesse James Armstrong (Brian James) beat Christopher

10/28/95 (Memphis, Tenn. live on WMC): Announced that Christopher defeated Armstrong ***.

11/25/95: (Memphis, Tenn.): Tax Slazenger beat Christopher for the held-up title.

11/27/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Christopher beat Slazenger.

12/2/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Slazenger beat Christopher.

* 4/10/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Due to no-contest decision in title defense against Brian Christopher the title was held up.

** Been the champion since defeating Tommy Rich on 12/31/94 in Memphis, Tenn.

*** 11/13/95 (Columbus, Ohio): Announced that due to outside interference during title defense against Slazenger, the championship is held-up.

Women's Championship

11/28/95 (Memphis, Tenn. live on WMC): The title is reactivated with Tasha Simone announced as the champion.

Tag Team Championship

1/9/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Doug Gilbert & Tommy Rich * beat PG13 (J.C. Ice & Wolfie D).

1/9/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): PG13 beat Gilbert & Rich.

1/14/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Gilbert & Rich beat PG13.

3/13/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): PG13 beat Gilbert & Rich.

4/15/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Brickhouse Brown & Gorgeous George III beat PG13.

5/1/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): PG13 beat Brown & George III.

7/3/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Rock & Roll Express ** (Robert Gibson & Ricky Morton) beat PG13.

7/10/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): PG13 beat Rock & Roll Express.

8/7/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): The Heavenly Bodies (Jimmy Del Rey & Tom Prichard) beat PG13.

8/28/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): PG13 beat Terry Gordy & Tracy Smothers in tournament final.

10/28/95 (Memphis, Tenn.): Jesse James Armstrong & Smothers beat PG13.

* Been the champions since defeating Beauty & The Beast (Jim & Ron Harris) in Dec. '94 in Memphis, Tenn.

** 4/11/95: Became Jim Crockett's first NWA World Tag Team Champions.

*** 8/5-11/26/95: Last SMW Tag Team Champions.

8/21/95 (Memphis, Tenn.) Due to controversial decision in title defense against PG13 the championship is held up then declared vacant.

SMOKY MOUNTAIN WRESTLING

SMW Hvt. Champion

1/28/95 (Knoxville, Tenn.): Jerry Lawler* beat Dirty White Boy**.

2/26/95 (Knoxville, Tenn.): Bobby Blaze *** beat Lawler.

4/8/95 (Johnson City, Tenn.): Buddy Landel **** beat Blaze.

8/12/95 (Johnson City, Tenn.): Brad Armstrong beat Landel for the held up title.

10/20/95 (Knoxville, Tenn.): Terry Gordy beat Armstrong in a special stipulation tag match.

11/23/95 (Knoxville, Tenn.): Armstrong beat Gordy.

11/25/95 (Johnson City, Tenn.): Tommy Rich beat Armstrong to become the last champion as of 11/26/95.

Special Mention: 12/26/95 (Louisville, Ky.): Jerry Lawler beat Brad Armstrong for the defunct title. The same "exchange" was re-done the next night in Memphis, Tenn.

*2/6-2/25/95: USWA Unified Hvt. Champion.

**7/5/94: Dirty White Boy is reinstated as the champion due to previous title holder Jake Roberts no-showing several cards. A phantom exchange was mentioned on SMW television.

***4/78/95: Became the last "Beat the Champ" TV Champion.

****On the 7/8/95 broadcast the title is announced as being held up following a controversial decision against Brad Armstrong in Barboursville, Tenn.

"Beat the Champ" TV Champion

2/6/95 (Lenoir, N.C.): Boo Bradley beat The Wolfman in an elimination match *.

2/6/95 (Lenoir, N.C.): Billy Black beat Bradley.

2/6/95 (Lenoir, N.C.): Killer Kyle beat Boo Bradley in an elimination match.

4/7/95 (Pikeville, Ky.): Bobby Blaze *** beat Kyle to become the last champion.

*Buddy Landel finished his run as champion, which began 12/5/94 defeating Brian Lee in Princeton, W.Va.

**In a worked angle, vacated the title "due to injuries"

***1/28-4/8/95: SMW Hvt. Champion.

SMW Tag Team Champions

4/7/95 (Pikeville, Ky.): Al Snow & Unabom * def. Rock & Roll Express *.

7/6/95 (Jellico, Tenn.): The Thugs (Dirty White Boy & Tracy Smothers) beat Snow & Unabom.

8/5/95 (Knoxville, Tenn.): The Heavenly Bodies ** (Jimmy Del Rey & Tom Prichard) beat The Thugs to become the last champions as of 11/26/95.

*Been the champions since defeating The Gangstas (New Jack & Mustafa) on 12/24/94 in Johnson City, Tenn.

**8/7-8/21/95: USWA World Tag Team Champions.

EXTREME CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING

ECW World Hvt. Championship

4/15/95 (Philadelphia, Pa.): The Sandman beat Shane Douglas *.

10/28/95 (Philadelphia, Pa.): Mikey Whipwreck beat Sandman.

12/9/95 (Philadelphia, Pa.): The Sandman ** beat Steve Austin & Mikey Whipwreck in a triangle match.

*Been the first champion since 8/27/94 in Philadelphia, Pa. defeating Too Cold Scorpio in

tournament final to become reactivated NWA World Hvt. Champion. Douglas rejects that title. His then present ECW Hvt. Title was elevated to World Title status as the company name was changed from Eastern to Extreme.

**10/28-12/30/95: World Tag Team Championship co-holder.

World TV Champion

3/18/95 (Philadelphia, Pa.): Too Cold Scorpio beat Dean Malenko *.

4/8/95 (Philadelphia, Pa.): Eddy Guerrero beat Scorpio.

7/21/95 (Tampa, Fla.): Dean Malenko beat Guerrero.

7/28/95 (Middletown, N.Y.): Guerrero beat Malenko.

8/25/95 (Jim Thorpe, Pa.): Too Cold Scorpio ** beat Guerrero.

12/30/95 (Queens, N.Y.): Mikey Whipwreck *** beat Scorpio.

*Been the champion since defeating Too Cold Scorpio on 11/4/94 in Hamburg, Pa. Also, from 2/25-4/8/95 was World Tag Team Champion co-holder.

**10/28-12/30/95: World Tag Team Champion co-holder.

***At same time also became World Tag Team Champion co-holder.

World Tag Team Champions

2/4/95 (Philadelphia, Pa.): Sabu & Taz beat The Public Enemy (Flyboy Rocco Rock & Johnny Grunge) *

2/25/95 (Philadelphia, Pa.): Chris Benoit & Dean Malenko ** beat Sabu & Taz.

4/8/95 (Philadelphia, Pa.): The Public Enemy beat Benoit & Malenko in a three-way match involving Rick Steiner & Taz.

6/30/95 (Jim Thorpe, Pa.): Raven & Steve Richards beat TPE.

9/10/95 (Philadelphia, Pa.): The Pit Bulls beat Raven & Richards.

10/7/95 (Philadelphia, Pa.): Raven & Richards beat The Pit Bulls.

10/7/95 (Philadelphia, Pa.): The Public Enemy beat Raven & Richards in a three-way dance match involving The Gangstas (New Jack & Mustafa Saed).

10/28/95 (Philadelphia, Pa.): The Sandman *** & Too Cold Scorpio **** became the champions as Scorpio defeated Flyboy Rocco Rock in a special singles match where Scorpio could pick his partner if he won.

12/30/95 (Queens, N.Y.): Cactus Jack & Mikey Whipwreck ***** became the champions as Whipwreck beat Scorpio with same stipulations as from the 9/26 exchange.

*Been the champions since defeating Cactus Jack & Mikey Whipwreck on 11/5/94 in Philadelphia, Pa.

**11/4/94-3/18/95: World TV Champion.

***12/9/95 : Became World Hvt. Champion.

****8/25-9/30/95: World TV Champion.

*****At the same time also became World TV Champion.

NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE

NWA Hvt. Champion

2/21/95 (Erlanger, Ky.): Dan Severn beat Chris Candido * to become the second champion.

*Been the first champion since defeating Tracy Smothers in a tournament final on 11/19/94 in Cherry Hill, N.J.

(Special thanks to Marty Campbell for this section)

Roster and Real Names

(The names included on the respective rosters are current as of February 1996)

WWF

Ringmaster	Steve Austin
Bob Backlund	Robert Backlund
Paul Bearer	William Moody
Justin Hawk Bradshaw	John Hawk
Brooklyn Brawler	Steve Lombardi
Bushwacker Butch	Robert Miller
Bushwacker Luke	Brian Wickens

Jim Cornette	James Cornette
Ted DiBiase	Ted DiBiase
Diesel	Kevin Nash
Duke Droese	Mike Droese

Fatu	Solofa Fatu
Mr. Fuji	Harry Fujiwara

Henry Godwinn	Mark Canterbury
Phinnius Godwinn	Dennis Knight
Goldust	Dustin Runnells
Bart Gunn	Mike Plotcheck
Billy Gunn	Kip Sopp

Hakushi	Kensuke Shinzaki
Bret Hart	Bret Hart
Owen Hart	Owen Hart
Hunter Hearst Helmsely	Paul Michael Levesque
Dok Hendrix	Michael Seitz
Bob Holly	William Robert Howard
Barry Horowitz	Barry Horowitz

Marty Jannetty	Marty Jannetty
Jeff Jarrett	Jeff Jarrett
Ahmed Johnson	Tony Norris
1-2-3 Kid	Sean Waltman

Mo	Bobby Horne
Mabel	Nelson Frasier
Mankind	Michael Foley
Shawn Michaels	Michael Hickenbottom
Aldo Montoya	P.J. Walker

Rad Radford	Louie Mucciolo
Razor Ramon	Scott Hall
Ringmaster	Steve Williams
Jake Roberts	Aurelian Smith Jr.

Psycho Sid	Sid Eudy
Body Donna Skip	Chris Candido
Davey Boy Smith	David Smith
Al Snow	Allen Sarven
Body Donna Sunny	Noreen Tamara Sytch

Tatanka	Chris Chavis
Undertaker	Mark Calloway
Vader	Leon White
Savio Vega	Juan Rivera

Issac Yankem	Glen Jacobs
Yokozuna	Rodney Anoia
Zeb	Dutch Mantel
Body Donna Zip	Tom Prichard

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WCW

Arn Anderson	Marty Lunde
Road Warrior Animal	Joe Laurinaitis
Brad Armstrong	Robert James Jr.
Scott Armstrong	Scott James
Steve Armstrong	Steve James
Johnny B. Badd	Marc Mero
Marcus Bagwell	Marcus Bagwell
Barbarian	Sionne Vailahi
Chris Benoit	Christopher Benoit
Boodie Man	Ed Leslie
Belfast Bruiser	David Finlay
Bunkhouse Buck	James Golden
Cobra	Clark Haines
Diamond Doll	Kimberly Falkenberg
Hacksaw Duggan	Jim Duggan
Alan Iron Eagle	Joe Gomez
James Earl	Dale Veazy
Sir Robert Eaton	Bobby Eaton
Elizabeth	Elizabeth Hewlet
Ric Flair	Richard Fliehr
The Giant	Paul Wight
Johnny Grunge	Mike Durham
Eddie Guerrero	Eduardo Guerrero
Road Warrior Hawk	Mike Hegstrand
Harlem Heat Booker T	Booker Huffman
Harlem Heat Stevie Ray	Lane Huffman
Bobby Heenan	Raymond Heenan
Hulk Hogan	Terry Bollea
Disco Inferno	Glen Gilberti
Konnar	Charles Ashenoff
Lex Luger	Larry Pfohl
Jerry Lynn	Jerry Lynn
Madusa	Debra Micelli
Joey Maggs	Joseph Magliano
Dean Malenko	Dean Simon
Meng	Uliuli Fifita
Hugh Morrus	William DeMott
Loch Ness	Luke McMasters
Nasty Boy Nobbs	Brian Yandrisovitz
Nasty Boy Saggs	Jerry Seganowich
Scott Norton	Scott Norton
One Man Gang	George Gray
Paul Orndorff	Paul Orndorff
Diamond Dallas Page	Page Falkenberg
Buddy Lee Parker	Dwayne Bruce
Col. Robert Parker	Robert Welch
The Patriot	Del Wilkes
Brian Pillman	Brian Pillman
Craig Pittman	Craig Pittman
Scott Riggz	Scott Antol
Flyboy Rocco Rock	Ted Petty
Lord Steven Regal	Darren Mathews
Dustin Rhodes	Dustin Runnels
Big Bubba Rogers	Ray Traylor
Randy Savage	Randy Poffo

Shark	John Tenta
Sister Sherri	Sherri Russell
Dean Malenko	Dean Simon
Dick Slater	Richard Van Slater
Dave Sullivan	Bill Dannenhauser
Kevin Sullivan	Kevin Francis Sullivan
Mark Starr	Mark Ashford-Smith
Sting	Steve Borden
Devon Storm	Chris Ford
Pat Tanaka	Patrick Tanaka
David Taylor	David Taylor
Terry Taylor	Paul Taylor
Ice Train	Harold Hoag
V.K. Wallstreet	Lawrence Rotunda
Robbie Walker	Robert Walker
Woman	Nancy Sullivan
Alex Wright	Alex Wright
Larry Zbyszko	Larry Whistler
ECW	
Don E. Allen	Don Adelberg
Chad Austin	Chad Austin
Don Harris	Don Harris
Ron Harris	Ron Harris
Paul E. Dangerously	Paul Heyman
Jimmy Del Rey	David Ferrier
Shane Douglas	Troy Martin
Big Dick Dudley	Alex Rizzo
Buh Buh Ray Dudley	Mark Lomonica
Dances with Dudley	Adolfo Bermudez
Tommy Dreamer	Thomas Laughlin
Eliminator Kronus	George Caiazo
Eliminator Saturn	Perry Satullo
Francine	Francine Fourmieri
Gangsta Mustafa	Jamal Mustafa
Gangsta New Jack	Jerome Young
Joel Hartgood	Larry McKenna
Head Hunter #1	Manny Santiago
Head Hunter #2	Victor Santiago
Cactus Jack	Michael Foley
Jason	Ronald Jason Knight
Blue Meanie	Brian Heffron
Beulah McGillicutty	Theresa Hays
Hack Myers	Donald Haviland
911	Al Poling
Pitbull #1	Gary Wolff
Pitbull #2	Anthony Durante
Raven	Scott Levy
El Puerto Ricano	Pablo Marques
Steve Richards	Steve Richards
Axl Rotten	Brian Knighton
Sabu	Terry Brunk
Sandman	James Fullington
Dino Sendoff	Dave Cruz
Too Cold Scorpio	Charles Skaggs
J.T. Smith	John T. Smith

Joey Styles	Joe Bonsignore
Taz	Pete Senerchia
Rob Van Dam	
Mikey Whipwreck	John Watson
Woman	Nancy Daus Sullivan

USWA

Jesse James Armstrong	Brian Armstrong
Scott Bowden	Scott Bowden
Brian Christopher	Brian Lawler
King Cobra	
Motley Cruz	David Price
Wolfie D	Kelly Wolfe
Bill Dundee	William Crookshanks
Reggie B. Fine	Reginald Washington
Doug Gilbert	Doug Gilbert
J.C. Ice	James Crookshanks
Jerry Lawler	Jerry Lawler
Tommy Rich	Thomas Richardson
Lady Satan	Cora Combs
Spellbinder	Del Rios
Miss Texas	Jaque Moore
Jimmy Valiant (part time)	James Valen
Koko B. Ware	James Ware
Tony Williams	Anthony Williams

AAA

(Select Top Names)	
Perro Aguayo	Pedro Aguayo
Cien Caras	Carmelo Reyes
Espectrito	Mario Jimenez
Konnar El Barbaro	Carlos Espada
Lizmark	Juan Banos
Latin Lover	Victor Resindez
Mascara Ano 2000	Jesus Reyes
Heavy Metal	Erick Casas
Psicosis	Dionicio Castellanos
Rey Misterio Jr.	Oscar Gonzales
Rey Misterio	Miguel Lopez
El Hijo del Santo	Jorge Guzman
Volador	Remo Banda

EDITOR'S NOTE

The "Torch Yearbook Appendix" is a work in progress. Each year my goal is to make it more exhaustive and accurate. Please bring to my attention any errors you find in this appendix (and the yearbook in general). If you are a wrestler in the listings and your name is spelled incorrectly, please drop me a note or call with a correction. Any additions or addendums to the Glossary of Wrestling Terms is also welcome. In future editions of *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly* we will list any corrections or additions on pg. 12 in the "End Notes" section, so for the record, you may want to check that area regularly and make corresponding corrections in your yearbook.

Wrestling Families throughout History

(For the sake of familiarity, wrestlers are listed by their stage names, not their true family names, such as the Armstrong family whose real last name is James.)

<u>Father</u>	<u>Son(s)</u>
Perro Aguayo Sr. Gene Anderson Afa Anoaia Sika Anoaia (Solofa Fatu (Fatu) and Sam Fatu (Samoan Savage, Tonga Kid) are nephews of brothers Afa and Sika) Bob Armstrong	Perryo Aguayo Jr. Brad Anderson Samula Anoaia (Samu) Rodney Anoaia Brad Armstrong Brian Armstrong Scott Armstrong Steve Armstrong
Sandy Barr	Art Barr Jesse Barr
Joe Blanchard Tony Borne Bulldog Bob Brown Warren Bockwinkel	Tully Blanchard Matt Borne Kerry Brown Nick Bockwinkel
Eduard Carpentier Pepe Tropi Casas	Jackie Wiecez Felino Negro Casas Heavy Metal
Hurricane Castillo Emilio Charles Sammy Cohen	Hurricane Castillo Jr. Emilio Charles Jr. Shaun Simpson Steve Simpson Stuart Simpson
Cora Combs Jim Crockett Sr. Wild Bill Curry	Debbie Combs Jim Crockett Jr. Fred Curry
Alfonso Dantes Iron Mike DiBiase (Iron Mike was Ted's adoptive father. Helen Hild, Ted's biological mother, was also a pro wrestler) Blue Demon Destroyer (Dick Beyer) Bill Dundee	Apollo Dantes Ted DiBiase Blue Demon Jr. Kurt Beyer Jamie Dundee
Edmund Francis	Bill Francis Russ Francis
Buddy Fuller	Robert Fuller Ron Fuller
Dory Funk Sr.	Dory Funk Jr. Terry Funk
Verne Gagne Ron Garvin Tommy Gilbert	Greg Gagne Jimmy Garvin (step-son) Doug Gilbert
Billy Golden Eddie Graham Fuerreza Guerrera Gory Guerrero	Eddie Gilbert Jimmy Golden Mike Graham Juventud Guerrera Chavo Guerrero Eddie Guerrero Hector Guerrero Mando Guerrero
El Gran Hamada	Sochi Hamada

Stu Hart (Davey Boy Smith and Jim Neidhart are married to two of Stu Hart's daughters.) Animal Hamaguchi Larry Hennig Mike Hussey	Bret Hart Bruce Hart Dean Hart Keith Hart Owen Hart Ross Hart Smith Hart Wayne Hart Kyoko Inoue (daughter) Curt Hennig Mark Rocco (Black Tiger)
King Curtis Iukea	Abbudah Dein
El Rayo De Jalisco Jerry Jarrett Rocky Johnson	El Rayo De Jalisco Jr. Jeff Jarrett Ricky Johnson
Duke Keomuka Gene Kiniski	Pat Tanaka Kelly Kiniski Nick Kiniski
Jerry Lawler Lizmark	Brian Christopher Kevin Christian Lizmark Jr.
Professor Boris Malenko Rey Mendoza	Dean Malenko Joe Malenko Villanos I Villanos II Villanos III Villanos IV Villanos V
Gorilla Monsoon Paul Morton Angelo Mosca Sr. Rikidozan (Mitsuhiro)	Joey Morella Ricky Morton Angelo Mosca Jr. Mitsuo Momota Yoshihuru Momota
Angelo Mosca Sr. Blackjack Mulligan	Angelo Mosca Jr. Barry Windham Kendall Windham
Frankie Murdoch	Dick Murdoch
Rip Oliver Bob Orton Sr.	Larry Oliver Barry O Bob Orton Jr.
Don Owens	Barry Owens
Miguel Perez Angelo Poffo	Miguelito Perez Lanny Poffo Randy Savage
Ivan Putski	Scotty Putski
Dusty Rhodes Ricky Romero	Dustin Rhodes Jay Youngblood Mark Youngblood
Jacques Rougeau Sr.	Armand Rougeau Jacques Rougeau Phillipe Rougeau Raymond Rougeau
Bruno Sammartino El Santo Angelo Savaldi Hans Schroeder Iron Mike Sharpe Sr.	David Sammartino El Hijo del Santo Joe Savaldi Leliani Kai Iron Mike Sharpe

Daro Singh Grizzly Smith	Tiger Jeet Singh Sam Houston Jake Roberts Rockin' Robin (daughter)
Paul Vachon Johnny Valentine Fritz Von Erich	Luna Vachon (daughter) Greg Valentine Chris Von Erich David Von Erich Kerry Von Erich Kevin Von Erich Mike Von Erich
Billy Watson Bill Watts Buddy Wayne Steve Wright	Phillip Watson Erik Watts Nightmare Ken Wayne Alex Wright

Other Relatives in Wrestling

(If they were listed above as brothers in the "fathers and sons" category, they are not also listed below.)

Ron & Don Bass (brothers)
Brad & Bart Batten (brothers)
El Brazo, Brazo de Oro, Brazo de Plata (brothers)
Jack & Jerry Brisco (brothers)
Doug & Mike Furnas (brothers)
Cien Caras, Mascara Ano & Universo Dos Mil (bros.)
Chris Champion & Mark Starr (brothers)
Ted & Vic Christy (brothers)
Bobby & Jerry Colt (brothers)
Christys and Colts (uncles/newphews)
Joel & Hoss Deaton (brothers)
Ted & John DiBiase (brothers)
Bobby & Jackie Fulton (brothers)
Tony Garea & Johnny Garcia (brothers)
Rick & Robert Gibson (brothers)
Ron & Don Harris (brothers)
Hulk Hogan & Horrace Boulder (uncle/nephew)
Scott & Bill Irwin (brothers)
Rocky & Ricky Johnson (brothers)
Pat & Mike Kelly (brothers)
Don Kernodle & Keith Larson (brothers)
Jerry Lawler & Honky Tonk Man (cousins)
Frenchy Martin & Rick Martel (brothers)
Mil Mascaras, Dos Caras, El Sicodelico (brothers)
Rey Misterio, Rey Misterio Jr. (uncle/nephew)
Raul & Carlos Matta (brothers)
Bill & Dan Miller (brothers)
Esther & Cynthia Moreno (sisters)
Bill & Randy Mully (brothers)
Blue Panther & Blue Panther (uncle/nephew)
Al & Lou Perez (brothers)
Jose & Miguel Perez (brothers)
Tom & Bruce Prichard (brothers)
Tommy & Johnny Rich (cousins)
Brett Wayne & Buzz Sawyer (brothers)
Mark Starr & Chris Champion (brothers)
Rick & Vic Steamboat (brothers)
Rick & Scott Steiner (brothers)
George (Cobra) & Shunji Takano (brothers)
El Texano, Silver King, El Dandy (related)
Road Warrior Animal, Johnny Ace, Terminator (bros.)
Booker T & Stevie Ray (brothers)
Chris & John Tolos (brothers)
Maurice, Paul, Vivan, and Marie Vachon (siblings)

Past Secondary Award Winners

15. Best Workrate ("Outstanding Wrestler" pre-1992)

1994: Sabu, Shawn Michaels, Bret Hart
 1993: Bret Hart, Shawn Michaels, Vader
 1992: Ric Flair, Bret Hart, Shawn Michaels
 1991: Ric Flair, Cactus Jack, Arn Anderson
 1990: Ric Flair, Curt Hennig, Bobby Eaton
 1989: Ric Flair, Terry Funk, Rick Steamboat

16. Independent MVP

1994: Sabu, Al Snow, Cactus Jack
 1993: Sabu, Terry Funk, Jerry Lawler
 1992: Lightning Kid, Eddie Gilbert, Terry Funk
 1991: Lightning Kid, Cactus Jack, Eddie Gilbert
 1990: Ricky Rice, Terry Funk, Cactus Jack
 1989: Ricky Rice, Jerry Lawler, Scotty the Body (Scott Levy)

17. Rookie of the Year

1994: Jean Paul LeVesque (Hunter Hearst Helmsley), Mikey Whipwreck, Alex Wright
 1993: Sabu, Chris Candido, Smoking Gunns
 1992: Brian Christopher, Too Cold Scorpio, Dallas Page
 1991: Lightning (1-2-3) Kid, Johnny B. Badd, Jerry Lynn
 1990: Steve Austin, El Gigante, J.W. Storm
 1989: Wayne Bloom, Dustin Rhodes, Larry Cameron
 1988: Scott Steiner, Ricky Rice, Derrick Dukes

18. Promotion of the Year

1994: ECW, WWF, AAA/IWC
 1993: SMW, WWF, WCW
 1992: SMW, WWF, USWA
 1991: WCW, WWF, TWA (Philadelphia)
 1990: WCW, USWA, WWF
 1989: NWA, WWF, Portland
 1988: WWF, NWA, CWA (now USWA)

19. Non-TV Promotion of the Year

1994: NWA New Jersey, NWA Michigan, Midwest Territorial (Mich.)
 1993: NWA World Wrestling Alliance (NJ), CWA (Ind.), Big D Pro (Dallas)
 1992: WWA (NJ), ECW (Phila.), PWA (Minn.)

20. Promoter of the Year

1994: Vince McMahon, Tod Gordon, Paul Heyman
 1993: Jim Cornette, Vince McMahon, Paul Heyman
 1992: Jim Cornette, Vince McMahon, Kip Frey

21. Angle of the Year

1994: Sandman fakes being blinded, Backlund goes psycho, then tricks parents at Survivor Series
 1993: Lawler-Hart at Summerslam, Kid upsets Ramon on Raw, Flair retires if loses at Starrcade
 1992: Hennig's Prime Time turn; Savage-Flair-Elizabeth; Michaels-Janetty break-up
 1991: Undertaker locks Ultimate Warrior in a casket; Flair's entrance into WWF; Savage bitten by Roberts's cobra
 1990: Gilbert hits Lawler with speeding car; Windham doubles as Sting and gets pinned; Sting thrown out as member of Four Horsemen

22. Rising Star ("Most Improved" pre-1992)

1994: Diesel, Sabu, Jean Pierre LeVesque (Hunter)
 1993: Too Cold Scorpio, Sabu, 1-2-3 Kid
 1992: Shawn Michaels, Brian Christopher, Too Cold Scorpio
 1991: Dustin Rhodes, Steve Austin, Cactus Jack
 1990: Ron Simmons, Scott Steiner, Butch Reed
 1989: Lex Luger, Scott Steiner, Rick Rude
 1988: Sting, Rick Steiner, Lex Luger

23. Career Tailsipin of the Year ("Most Deproved" pre-1992)

1994: Ric Flair, Lex Luger, Undertaker
 1993: Rick Rude, Mr. Perfect, Sid Vicious

1992: Owen Hart, Ron Simmons, Hulk Hogan
 1991: Hulk Hogan, Lex Luger, Roddy Piper
 1990: Sting, Dusty Rhodes, Kerry Von Erich
 1989: Terry Taylor, Dino Bravo, Hacksaw Duggan
 1988: Dusty Rhodes, Greg Valentine, Ken Patera

24. Best Weekly TV Show

1994: WWF Raw, ECW syndicated, WCW Sat. Night
 1993: WWF Raw, SMW, ECW
 1992: SMW, WWF Superstars, WWF Prime Time
 1991: WCW Sat., WWF Superstars, WWF Prime
 1990: WCW Sat., WWF Superstars, USWA Challenge (Dallas)
 1989: NWA World Championship (Sat.), NWA Power Hour, WWF Superstars
 1988: WWF Superstars, NWA World Championship (Sat.), WWF Saturday Night's Main Event (not weekly)

25. Most Embarrassing Wrestler

1994: Dave Sullivan, Doink, Hulk Hogan
 1993: Shockmaster, Bastion Booger, Doink
 1992: Papa Shango, Erik Watts, Van Hammer
 1991: Van Hammer, P.N. News, Oz (Kevin Nash)

26. Worst Wrestler (with a semblance of a push)

1994: Dave Sullivan, Hulk Hogan, Hacksaw Duggan
 1993: Equalizer, Shockmaster, Giant Gonzales
 1992: Erik Watts, Nailz, Van Hammer
 1991: Van Hammer, Bill Kazmaier, Oz
 1990: Junkyard Dog, Ultimate Warrior, Night Stalker (a/k/a Adam Bomb)
 1989: Andre the Giant, Ultimate Warrior, Zeus
 1988: Andre the Giant, Ultimate Warrior, Junkyard Dog

27. Best Announcing Team

1994: Schiavone & Heenan, McMahon & Lawler, Cruise & Mike Tenay
 1993: McMahon & Heenan, Schiavone & Ventura, Caudle & Mantel
 1992: Bobby Heenan & Gorilla Monsoon, Bob Caudle & Dutch Mantel, Vince McMahon & Mr. Perfect
 1991: Jim Ross & Paul E. Dangerously, Monsoon & Heenan, McMahon & Roddy Piper & Randy Savage
 1990: Ross & Dangerously, McMahon & Jesse Ventura, Monsoon & Heenan
 1989: McMahon & Ventura, Ross & Jim Cornette, Ross & Caudle

28. Best on Interviews

1994: Ric Flair, Shane Douglas, Cactus Jack
 1993: Ric Flair, Jim Cornette, Jerry Lawler
 1992: Ric Flair, Jim Cornette, Cactus Jack

29. Most Underutilized

1994: Brian Pillman, Steve Austin, 1-2-3 Kid
 1993: Chris Benoit, Terry Taylor, Bobby Eaton
 1992: Terry Taylor, Arn Anderson, Scotty Flamingo (Levy)

30. Most Overpushed

1994: Hulk Hogan, Hacksaw Duggan, Lex Luger
 1993: Sid Vicious, Lex Luger, Dustin Rhodes
 1992: Erik Watts, Van Hammer, Tatanka

31. Most Insulting Stereotype

1994: The Gangstas, Men on a Mission, Dave Sullivan
 1993: Yokozuna, Missy Hyatt, Harlem Heat
 1992: Razor Ramon, Missy Hyatt, Papa Shango

32. Best Wrestling Maneuver

1994: Sabu moonsault table break, Vader moonsault, Vader inverted powerbomb
 1993: Vader's moonsault, Scorpio's 450 degree splash, Scott Steiner's Frankensteiner
 1992: Scorpio's 450 degree splash, Frankensteiner, Liger Shooting Star Press

33. Worst Wrestling Maneuver

1994: Hogan legdrop, Butcher sleeper, Honky Tonk Man neckbreaker

1993: Shockmaster's bearhug, Crush's headvice, Lex Luger's loaded forearm
 1992: Erik Watts STF, Crush's head vice, Shango's voodoo

34. Worst Match

1994: Midget Mixed Tag (S. Series), Undertaker vs. Undertaker (S.Slam), Flair vs. Hogan (H. Havoc)
 1993: Doinks vs. Bigelow et al (No. 24), Shockmaster vs. Kong (Dec. 27), War Games (Sept. 19)
 1992: Rick Rude vs. Masa Chono (Oct. 25), Hogan vs. Sid Justice (Apr. 5), Todd Champion vs. Super Invader (May 17)

35. Worst Personality

1994: Hulk Hogan, Dave Sullivan, Eric Bischoff
 1993: Sid Vicious, Lex Luger, Lord Steven Regal
 1992: Erik Watts, Van Hammer, Papa Shango

36. Worst Interviews

1994: Dave Sullivan, Hulk Hogan, Bob Backlund
 1993: Scott Steiner, Ice Train, Crush
 1992: Erik Watts, Tony Atlas, Van Hammer

37. Readers' Personal Favorite Wrestler

1994: Ric Flair, Sabu, Shawn Michaels
 1993: Ric Flair, Shawn Michaels, Vader
 1992: Ric Flair, Bret Hart, Ron Simmons

38. Readers' Least Favorite Wrestler

1994: Hulk Hogan, Doink, Dave Sullivan
 1993: Sid Vicious, Dusty Rhodes, Equalizer
 1992: Erik Watts, Ultimate Warrior, Nailz

39. Japan Tag Team of the Year

1994: Misawa & Kobashi, Hawk & Sasaki, Steiners
 1993: Toyota & Yamada, Hell Raisers, Misawa & Kobashi
 1992: Manami Toyota & Toshiyo Yamada, Mitsuohara Misawa & Toshiaki Kawada, Terry Gordy & Steve Williams
 1991: Hiroshi Hase & Kensuke Sasaki, Misawa & Kawada, Gordy & Williams
 1990: Williams & Gordy, Chono & Muto, Misawa & Kawada

40. Japan Feud of the Year

1994: Williams vs. Kobashi, Williams vs. Kawada, Onita vs. Pogo
 1993: Misawa et al vs. Kobashi et al, WAR vs. Skinheads, Hansen vs. Kobashi
 1992: Liger vs. Samurai, Misawa & Co. vs. Tsuruta & Co., Chono vs. Muto
 1991: Misawa vs. Tsuruta, Gordy & Williams vs. Misawa & Kawada, Vader vs. Tatum Fujinami
 1990: Misawa vs. Tsuruta, Liger vs. Naoki Sano, Luger vs. Pegasus Kid (Chris Benoit)

41. Japan Match of the Year

1994: Aja Kong vs. Toyota (11/20), Benoit vs. Sasuke (4/16), Liger vs. Sasuke (4/16)
 1993: Kansai & Ozaki vs. Toyota & Yamada (Apr. 11), Kobashi vs. Williams (Aug. 31), Hansen vs. Kobashi (July 29)
 1992: Toyota vs. Yamada (8/15), Chono vs. Muta (NWA tourn.), Toyota vs. Inoue (5/92)
 1991: Hase & Sasaki vs. Steiners (3/9), Misawa & Kawada & Kobashi vs. Tsuruta & Akira Taue & Masa Fuchi (4/20), Liger vs. Owen Hart (4/28)

42. Japan Promotion of the Year

1994: New Japan, All Japan Women, All Japan
 1993: All Japan Women, All Japan (Men), New Japan
 1992: New Japan, All Japan, All Japan Women
 1991: All Japan, New Japan, All Japan Women
 1990: All Japan, New Japan, UWF (now defunct)

43. Mexican Feud of the Year

1994: Konnan vs. Perro Aguayo, Los Gringos Locos vs. AAA, Konnan vs. Jake Roberts

44. Mexican Match of the Year

New Category

Glossary of Insider Wrestling Terms

The following is a list of over 150 wrestling terms, many of which are insider terms (i.e. "jargon") or are mainstream terms with their insider definition, which generally have been exclusive to the behind-the-scenes aspects of the wrestling business for most of this century, although in recent years as the inner-workings of the wrestling industry have become more open, many terms have been adopted by staunch fans and journalists who cover professional wrestling. Many of the terms date back to pro wrestling's carnival days in the early-1900s. Basic wrestling terms such as bodyslam and turnbuckle are not defined. (A term which is defined elsewhere, but used within a definition is denoted with "[dfn.]" in case cross-reference is desired.)

A-Show (n) A wrestling event featuring the biggest name stars on a given night when another card is being run that same night by the same promotion in another town with lesser perceived wrestlers. **B-Team [dfn.]** and **C-Team** are how lesser shows are referred to.

A-Team (n) A group of wrestlers who are currently participating on A-shows [dfn.].

Abortion (n) A failed angle [dfn.], match, or feud [dfn.]; a flop. (Term being phased out in some circles due to emotions associated with that word; considered in some circles a tasteless term.)

Angle (n) An event or series of events, usually a confrontation of some kind among wrestlers and managers, that begins or intensifies a feud.

Apter Mags (n) 1. Used to describe family of magazines of which Bill Apter is part of the staff. The magazine group, most prominent of which is *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, came to be identified with editor Apter in the '70s. 2. Sometimes used to describe all magazines that contain fictional articles rather than straight journalism.

Arm Color (n.): A bleeding arm, usually through blading [dfn.]

Around the Horn (n) The road trip to each town or a series of towns in which a promotion runs events.

B-Show (n) A wrestling event featuring the secondary team of lesser name-value wrestlers when on the same night in another town a group of bigger name wrestlers are putting on an event. The other show is the A-show [dfn.].

B-Team (n) A group of wrestlers who are currently participating on B-shows [dfn.].

Baby (n) Short for "babyface" [dfn.], although "Face" [dfn.] is more commonly used as short for "babyface."

Babyface (n) The "good guy" or "hero." The performer whom the promoter books [dfn.] in the position of being cheered.

Blade (v) To cut one's self, usually with a small portion of a razor blade with tape wrapped around all but a fraction of a millimeter of the cutting edge. The

exposed portion is then run across the skin to cause a clean, shallow slice in the skin which bleeds.

Blow Off (v) To end a feud [dfn.] or marriage [dfn.] at a wrestling card, usually a pay-per-view, with a decisive finish to a match between two feuding wrestlers; each wrestler usually moves on to feud with someone else although at times it is one or both wrestlers' final match for the given promotion.

Blow Up (v) To become cardiovascularly exhausted during a match.

Book 1. (v) To schedule a wrestler for a card. 2. (n) Slang for booking position.

Booked (n) Past tense of book [dfn.], to be scheduled for a card.

Booker (n) One who books [dfn.] and hires wrestlers, decides who wins and loses matches and in what manner those finishes occur, plans the long-term direction of the company, and organizes and plots television programs.

Bootleg (adj.) Describing an item that is illegally duplicated and sold or traded, usually copyrighted tapes, either wrestling broadcasts or commercial tapes, traded among wrestling fans around the country. Also describes someone who deals in bootlegged material. (There is also public domain selling and trading that takes place which is legal and not considered "bootleg" dealing.)

Bounce (n) Old, rarely used term for the move that leads to the pinfall.

Boys (n) Wrestlers.

Bozark (n) A female wrestler; a rarely used old carney [dfn.] term.

Brass (n) Management.

Bull (n) Old, rarely used term for the promoter.

Bump (n, v) To fall to the mat after being on the receiving end of a wrestling maneuver or blow to the body.

Bury (v) 1. To criticize or attempt to defame someone. 2. To lower someone in the eyes of the fans or their peers.

Broadway (n) A draw, called that because years ago it was considered a positive by both wrestlers.

Business, The (n) The wrestling industry.

Call a Match (v) Inform opponent throughout match of upcoming moves or spots [dfn.]; i.e. to "lead the dance."

Canned Heat (n) When crowd cheering and booing is added to a wrestling TV show in post-production.

Card (n) A line-up of matches.

Carney (n.) Short for "carnival terminology," the root of many insider wrestling terms where professional wrestling has roots in the early-1900s.

Carry (v) 1. To "call a match" [dfn.]. 2. To make a lesser opponent look skillful in the eyes of the fans.

Chairshot (v) The act of hitting someone with a chair during the course of a wrestling match or brawl.

Cheap Heat (n) Usually referring to heel [dfn.] fan heat [dfn.], although can refer to any form of fan heat, to achieve heat through means that do not take polished and respected skill, such as swearing at fans, using racial epithets, making lewd hand gestures, or exploiting a political situation (i.e. a hostage crisis, war, or natural disaster).

Color (n) Blood.

Comeback (n.): The point in a match where a wrestler, usually a babyface [dfn.] begins to show signs of life by taking over offense after the other wrestler, usually a heel, has been dominating offense for several minutes.

Cut a Promo (v) 1. To be interviewed or give promotional speech on upcoming match in order to arouse fan interest in match. 2. (slang) To brow-beat or demean someone skillfully.

Dagger (n) A prepared blade with more of the razor exposed than necessary.

Dark Match (n) A match that is not taped for television at a television taping or live broadcast.

Deal, The (n) A title belt may sometimes be referred to as The Deal.

Do Business (v.): Do a job [dfn.] when asked.

Doing Business on the Way Out (n.): To do jobs [dfn.] before one leaves a particular promotion. By doing clean jobs to talent that is staying is considered good etiquette in order to give those wrestlers some added momentum or credibility in the fans' eyes at the departing wrestler's expense.

Double Juice (adj.) Means two wrestlers bladed [dfn.] during a given match. Can be expanded to "triple juice," etc.

Draw (n) 1. A time-limit match with no winner. 2. Insider term for cash payment night of show as an advance on the earned paycheck to be issued later; a per diem.

Dusty finish (n) To have an apparent pinfall in a match, usually counted by a second referee, only to have it overruled by the original referee, who usually was temporarily knocked out while the second referee counted a pinfall. (Although not a finish invented by Dusty Rhodes, it was used so often by Rhodes during his booking reigns that the finish [dfn.] has taken on his name.)

Face (n) Short for babyface [dfn.].

False Comeback (n) The point in a match where the babyface [dfn.] begins to regain offense only to quickly be stopped by heel; done to arouse heat [dfn.].

Feeding (v.): The heel's [dfn.] role during a babyface [dfn.] comeback [dfn.] where he runs at the babyface only to be repeatedly fended off, with the hope that the

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series of bumps [dfn.] by the heel will generate positive fan heat [dfn.] for the babyface. Babyface wrestlers like a "good feeder" (n.). A babyface can also feed the heel in hope of generating fan sympathy.

Feud (n) A feigned battle, usually a series of matches, between two or more wrestlers or teams meant to draw fans to an arena.

Finish (n) The ending to a match; can include a series of stock events that lead up to the pinfall, submission, disqualification, countout, or draw.

Finisher (n) Move that leads to end of match.

Foreign Object (n) An object foreign to a match; a weapon to be used to injure an opponent. (Sometimes jokingly called an "international object" stemming from Ted Turner's policy in the late-'80s of never referring to anything as "foreign," but rather to use the word "international," on television stations he owned; although primarily aimed at CNN, it was picked up by TBS wrestling announcers.)

Garbage Wrestling (n): A term for the style of wrestling that incorporates frequent use of massive bleeding, foreign objects, gimmick stipulations, and brawling in and out of the ring without much traditional athleticism and ring psychology; a wrestling style that takes more "guts" and endurance for pain than practiced skill.

Gas (n) Steroids.

Gate (n) Amount of money generated from ticket sales.

Geek (v) Cut one's self.

Gig Mark (n) A scar from blading.

Gimmick. (n) 1. The persona, usually artificially created, one has in order to draw fan interest. 2. Slang for a foreign object [dfn.].

Gimmicked (v) Slang for hitting someone with a foreign object [dfn.].(adj.) Indicates object has been altered, i.e. "gimmicked chair" would indicate it was altered to break easily when used as a weapon.

Gizzmo (n) Old term for gimmick [dfn.]

Glob (v) To stiff [dfn.] someone.

Go Home (v) Said by one wrestler to another, meaning to go to the finish of a match.

Go Over (v) To beat someone. (also, "put over")

Go Through (n): A time limit draw.

Going Bush (v) Moving from major league, full-time promotion to a regional or independent, i.e. "bush league"; an older term not used much today.

Good Hand (n): A wrestler who other wrestlers enjoy working with due to that wrestler being in total control during the match, not getting lost, and not working too stiff [dfn.] or too light [dfn.] Also called a "Steady Hand." Opposite is a "Poor Hand" or "Bad Hand."

Green Boy (n) Inexperienced wrestler.

Gusher (n) A deep, heavily bleeding cut, usually as a result of blading [dfn.]; severity of cut can be intended or unintended.

Handles (n) Names wrestlers use among themselves, sometime real names, usually not their ring names; an older term not often used today.

Hardway (adv.) A type of cut incurred without a razor blade, usually unintentionally.

Heat 1. (n) Crowd noise, usually means boos and jeers, although also refers to general crowd noise, including cheers and clapping. 2. (slang) To "have heat" is to be in poor standing with someone.

Heavy (n): A wrestler who is hard to lift, although not necessarily due to his size. A small wrestler who simply doesn't cooperate well in being lifted could be called heavy.

Heel (n) The "bad guy" or "villain." The performer whom the promoter books [dfn.] in the position of being booed.

Highspot (n) A move, usually aerial, that includes fast motion among two or more wrestlers; often risk is involved or at least perceived.

Hold Up (v) When a wrestler refuses to wrestle until he gets a payday bigger than originally agreed upon with the promoter.

Hood (n) Masked wrestler.

Hope Spot (n): While a babyface [dfn.] is being beaten on by the heel to generate heat [dfn.], he teases a comeback [dfn.] to raise fans' hope that he is making a full-fledged comeback, only to have the heel [dfn.] take over offense once again. A "hope spot" usually comes just a few seconds or minutes before a full-fledged babyface comeback.

Hot Move (n) A highspot (dfn.); a maneuver by a wrestler that is exciting.

Hot Tag (n) When a battered babyface finally tags fresh partner.

House (n) Number of fans in building, can include non-paying fans.

House Show (n) 1. A card not taped for television. 2. An event in a town visited consistently by the given promotion.

Job (n) A planned, voluntary loss.

Jobber (n) Wrestler who loses, usually on television, to help image of pushed [dfn.] wrestler; preliminary wrestler; one who does jobs [dfn.]

Jobroni (n, slang) 1. Slang for jobber [dfn.] 2. Used to refer to wrestler with a push [dfn.] who has done several jobs [dfn.] lately.

Juice (v) To cut oneself in order to draw blood, usually from the forehead. (n) 1. Blood. 2. Slang for steroids or other muscle-enhancing drugs.

Kay Fabian (n) Slang term for a mark [dfn.] (See also, Kayfabe).

Kayfabe, Ka-Fabe (n, v, adj) Dating back to carnival days, this word is used in many contexts, generally referring to the protecting of industry "secrets." (The word is often said by one in the business to indicate everyone around him should stop talking openly because someone not privy to the inner-workings of the business just entered a room. To "kayfabe someone" is to withhold information from them.)

Lead Ass (n., adj.,v.): A wrestler who is uncooperative in the ring. A "lead ass" wrestler will "lead ass" his opponent in the ring.

Light (adv.): To work "light" or "lightly" is to give the appearance to the audience of not laying in one's punches and kicks hard or in general trying to be too easy on one's opponent. Considered derogatory.

Loose (adj.) To work loose is to be a wrestler who applies holds and moves with less force than average; considered a positive in most situations. Opposite of tight [dfn.]

Mark. (n) 1. A person who believes wrestling matches to be real. Dates back to wrestling's roots in carnivals where the targets of carnival scams were referred to as "marks." Some sources say in the carnival days, when an operator of a scam spotted a real sucker, he would mark his back with a piece of chalk, thus literally "marking" the "mark." Other sources say the term comes from the idea of "hitting the mark" successfully, with the idea being the scam was aimed at the vulnerable sucker, and when it worked, it hit the "mark." 2. A fan of or participant in the wrestling industry who believes in whole or in part that any aspect of the wrestling industry is more important than making money (i.e. a wrestler could be referred to as a mark by a promoter or other wrestlers for being preoccupied with fan-perception (such as holding a title belt) more than being concerned with being paid what he is worth.); (n, slang) A person who believes they are an expert on the wrestling business based on limited knowledge of the inner-workings of the sport; derogatory.

Mark Out. (v, slang) To enthusiastically be into an angle [dfn.] or match as if you were "a mark"; to suspend one's disbelief for the sake of enjoying to a greater extent a match or an angle [dfn.].

Marriage (n) 1. A feud [dfn.] between two wrestlers or teams. 2. A series of matches that goes to each town in which a promotion runs live events, sometimes more than once in each town, until the feud is finished.

Marshmallow (n) A fat wrestler; old, rarely used term.

Mouthpiece (n) An on-camera manager.

No-sell (v): To stop selling [dfn.] a move or moves of your opponent in order to give the impression you are invincible at that moment (i.e. Hulk Hogan's "superman comeback" [dfn.] at the end of his matches, Jerry Lawler after pulling down his strap, Road Warrior Hawk throughout much of his typical match).

No-show (v) To not show up for a scheduled appearance, can refer either to a promoter falsely booking a wrestler or a wrestler missing a scheduled appearance.

Office (n) 1. The headquarters of a wrestling

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Promotion. 2. Slang for the promoter and office workers, source of decisions that affect wrestlers on the road.

Over (adj.) Popular with intended audience.

Paper (v) To give away tickets to an event, often done to fill seats for television tapings.

Paying Dues (v) General term for gaining experience and showing respect toward veterans; includes in-ring experience, long drives, hard work for low pay.

Pencil (n) A booker [dfn.] or promoter.

Plant (n) A person—sometimes a wrestler, office employee, or friend or relative of employee—in audience who feigns being a fan and participates in angle [dfn.].

Policeman (n) A wrestler skillful or strong enough to enforce a promoter's wishes; able and willing to shoot [dfn.] to make a point with unruly opponent; somewhat outdated today.

Pop. (v) A rise, usually cheering or booing, out of the crowd.

Post (v) To ram opponent's head into the steel ring post or similar object.

Potato (v) To legitimately, either accidentally or on purpose, hit or execute a move with force on opponent.

Program (n) Same as feud [dfn.] or marriage [dfn.], including matches, interviews, and angles [dfn.].

Promoter (n.) Usually refers to the head of a wrestling company, although can refer to regional promoters who help the head of a company promote events.

Promotion 1. (n) A wrestling company. 2. (v) Hype for an event.

Pullapart Brawl (n) A brawl involving an original batch of combatants and several more wrestlers from the locker room who intended to either take sides or break up the original brawl.

Push (v) The act of a wrestler being promoted on television and through other means in order to give that wrestler popularity or recognition, usually through victories, interviews, and television features.

Put Over (v) 1. To be "put over" is to get the pinfall victory. To "put someone over" is to get pinned. 2. To compliment someone.

Receipt (n) Used in the context of a shoot or a work, the act of gaining justified revenge, i.e. doing something that if it weren't a retaliatory tactic would be seen as being wrong.

Red. (n) Blood.

Ref Bump (n.): When the referee takes a bump [dfn.] at a specified time in a match so a wrestler or manager, usually a heel, can commit an illegal move against his opponent. The referee usually remains stunned just long enough for the illegal act to take place.

Rest Hold (n) A hold that takes place during a match

that gives wrestlers time to breathe between highspots, applied lightly, without pressure.

Ring Rat (n.): A woman who hangs around arenas and hotels after wrestling cards looking to go to bed with wrestlers.

Road Agent (n) Employee who travels with wrestlers and oversees execution of house shows.

Screwjob (adj.) A finish with controversial ending, usually upsetting fans, often inconclusive or unsatisfying; often a reversal against the babyface (derogatory).

Sell (v) To act as if you have been on the receiving end of a legitimate wrestling or fighting maneuver, both in motion and in facial expression.

Sheets (n) Slang for industry trade journals, newsletters, results bulletins, fanzines, and fan club bulletins; often used in a derogatory tone. (Of those publications, those which contain "insider" information are also referred to as "kayfabe sheets." Derogatory terms include "dirt sheets," "rag sheets," and "scandal sheets.")

Shoot (n, adj.) 1. A work [dfn.] that becomes a legitimate wrestling contest or fight. 2. (v, slang) To legitimately hit or hurt one's opponent on purpose. 3. (adj.) A comment with some truth behind it.

Shooter (n) One who shoots [dfn.] using amateur wrestling skills.

Showing Light (v) Because of flawed execution, to unintentionally expose to fans that a maneuver did not connect, i.e. someone throwing a punch which the opponent sells [dfn.] when the punch did not come close to hitting the opponent.

Smarm (n) A relatively new slang term for a fan who believes he or she is "smart" [dfn.] based on a certain amount of inside knowledge, but is perceived by someone else (usually someone within the industry) to be less informed than the fan himself or herself believes; combination of the words smart and mark [dfn.].

Smart (n) A person who has knowledge of the inner-workings of the wrestling business.

Smoz (n) A crowd of wrestlers during a pullapart [dfn.] brawl.

Soft (adj.) See "loose."

Spot (n) A wrestling move or series of moves.

Spot Show (n) A wrestling event held in a town not visited on a consistent basis.

Squash 1. (n, adj.) A match, usually on television designed to put over [dfn.] a pushed [dfn.] wrestler who dominates offense and beats opponent, usually a jobber [dfn.]. 2. (v) To dominate offense and win a match.

Stiff 1. (adj.) To hit harder or execute holds and moves with more force than most; one who "works [dfn.] tight." 2. (v) When a promoter doesn't pay a wrestler or when a wrestler takes an advance payment and doesn't show up at the card [dfn.]

Stocking (n) Old term for masked wrestler.

Stooge 1. (n) Anyone who informs promoter of something wrestlers would prefer to be kept secret, often another wrestler or referee. 2. (v) To tell on someone.

Strap (n) Championship belt.

Stretch (v) To use a legitimate and painful amateur wrestling hold.

Stretched (v) To be injured, sometimes intentionally by opponent; also refers to a worked [dfn.] injury.

Stretchered (v) To be carried out on a stretcher while feigning an injury suffered during a match or an angle.

Strong Style Wrestling (n) A form of worked [dfn.] wrestling found in Japan that stresses realistic-looking action at the expense of highspots [dfn.]. Sometimes called "shooting," although that's rarely an accurate account of the matches it is referring to.

Submission Hold. (n) 1. A hold that fans believe can lead to the finish of a match via submission. 2. A hold that is meant to invoke high emotion due to being complicated and more devastating-looking than a common resthold.

Superman Comeback (n.): To begin no-selling [dfn.] your opponent's moves during your comeback giving the aura of invincibility in order to generate positive fan heat.

Swerve (n) 1. A joke pulled by one wrestler on another. 2. A false report by a wrestler or promoter to another wrestler or promoter or a member of the press.

Switch the Heat (v) To pass blame.

Territory (n) 1. The area in which a given promotion runs wrestling matches and airs its television show. 2. Slang for actual territorial wrestling promotion.

Tight (adj) To work tight is to be a wrestler who applies holds and moves with more force than average; realistic. Can be a negative or positive quality, depending on the style the opponent prefers. Opposite of loose [dfn.], soft [dfn.]

Tope (v) Flying move over top rope from inside the ring to floor (pronounced toe-pay).

Trust (n) An alliance among regional promotions.

Turn (v) To change one's persona from heel [dfn.] to babyface [dfn.] or from babyface to heel.

Tweener. (n) One who is neither a babyface [dfn.] nor a heel [dfn.], or one who is in the process of turning [dfn.] from one to the other.

Work. (n) 1. A rationalized lie. 2. Predetermined outcome. (v) To lie, deceive, or mislead someone. 3. (v) To skillfully wrestle.

Worker (n) Wrestler. Context is usually positive.

Workrate (n) The pace of a match and the skill level exhibited therein.